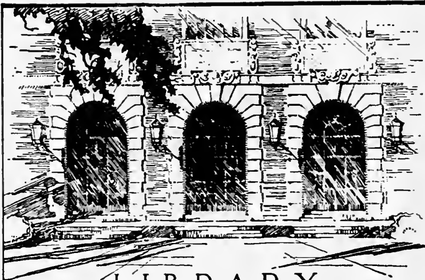

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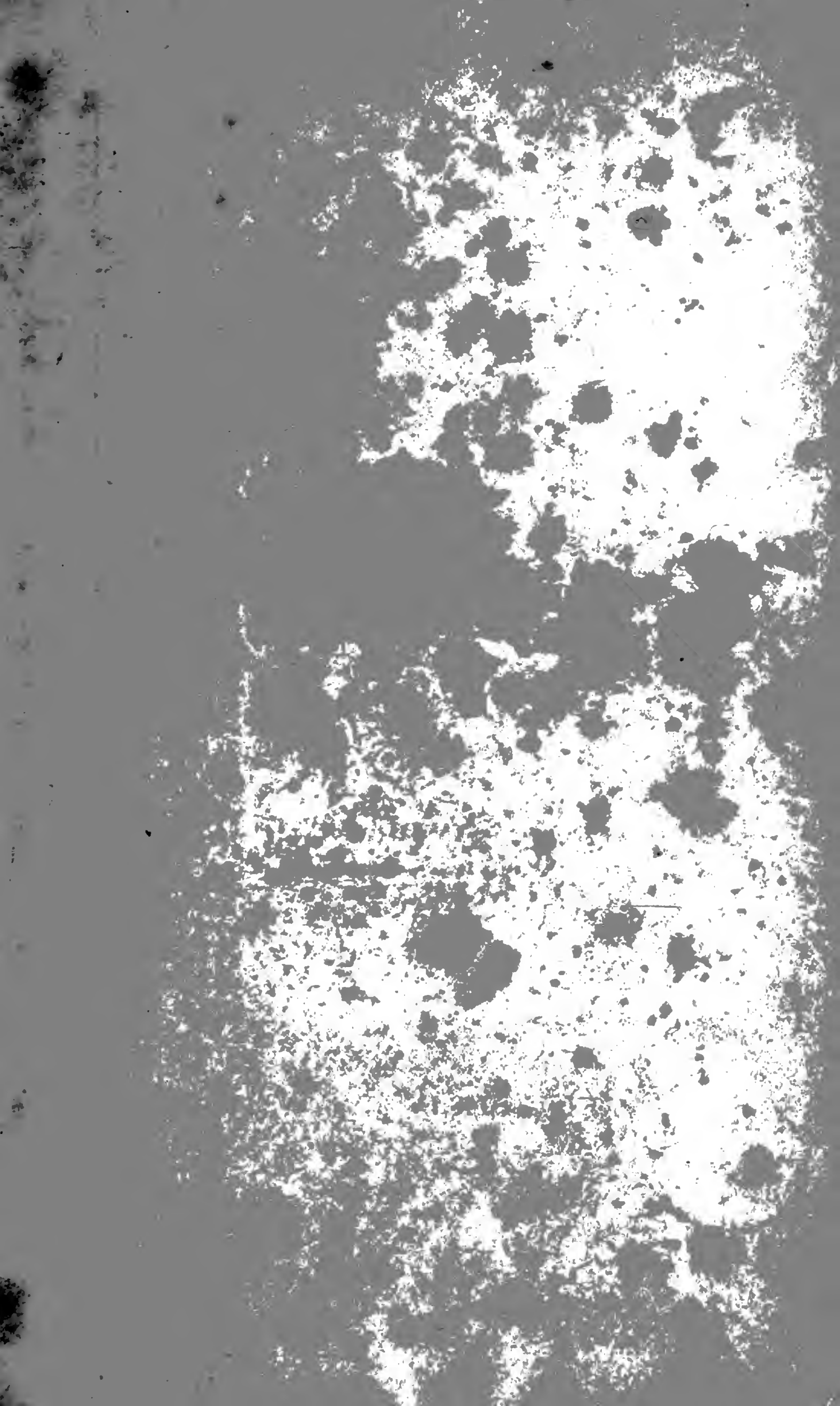

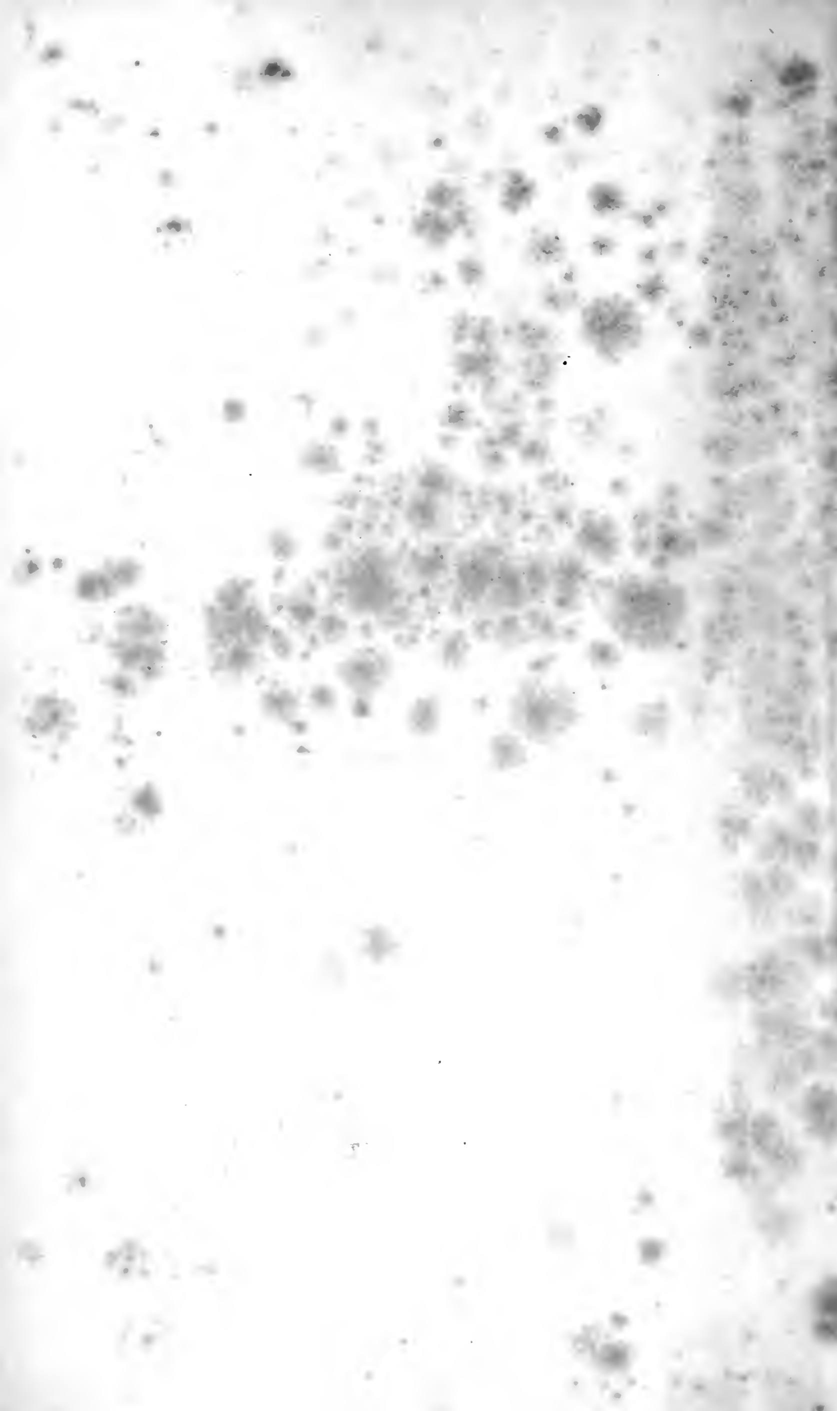

RAVENSCLIFFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"EMILIA WYNDHAM," "THE WILMINGTONS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
COLBURN AND CO., PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1851.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM TYLER,
BOLT-COURT.

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RAVENSCLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

> Behold her there,
> As I beheld her ere she knew my heart,
> The darling of my manhood.
>
> TENNYSON.

It is the day before Eleanor Wharncliffe is to be married to Randal Langford.

It is yet only the beginning of March, for the marriage has been hastened forward, and Eleanor hurried on with a speed she had been little prepared for. But such is the usual course of such proceedings when once consent has been obtained, and everything is settled, and she was too reasonable, too good, too anxious to pro-

mote Randal's happiness, not to do considerable violence to herself by acquiescing in this rather than give him pain, and run the risk of offending all the rest by remonstrance or hesitation.

The family party on the Wharncliffe side is assembled at Lidcote Hall, and the Langfords are expected to a late dinner in the evening of this day, at which we are now arrived.

Everard Wharncliffe had come to Lidcote the evening before, being accompanied by one or two intimate friends of his ; indeed, connections of the family. There was Richard Delamere, his cousin in the third degree, and Henry Duckenfield, his cousin in the fourth degree, and a few more. Very intimate friends of his they were, young men of the world, and much of his own stamp, and as completely absorbed in the affairs of to-day as he was. These young men, however, formed the only company staying in the house. Eleanor had no intimate female friend of her own, and was not in a humour to feel any pleasure in seeing mere acquaintance. Since her engage-

ment she had more than ever appeared to shun the society of girls of her own age;—and seemed to like to be by herself or with her mother alone. Since her engagement with Langford was concluded, it had seemed almost as if she took refuge with her mother against her own thoughts and recollections, clinging to her, as it were, in a manner which she had never done before.

This was natural enough between those of so different a way of thinking in general, when in one thing they certainly agreed, and this was, in the desire to dwell upon and enhance the good qualities of Randal Langford. The only satisfaction Eleanor could find under the weight of her hidden sense of infidelity, seemed to be in the reiterated assurances of her mother that Randal Langford's happiness was entirely dependent upon her, and in the enumeration of his good qualities. This subject Lady Wharncliffe was never tired of expatiating, and Eleanor sought thus to justify to herself the immensity of the sacrifice, which, at the expense of so much truth and candour,

under a heavy sense of her own disapprobation, she was about to make.

Lady Wharncliffe, as you will by this time be well aware, was a thorough adept in the arts of petty sophistry, and it was to such that she directed her conversation, though mostly in an indirect way: endeavouring to strengthen her daughter's resolution, and to silence that voice of conscience which was perpetually struggling to make itself heard in Eleanor's breast. And thus the courtship had gone on, and the time had slipped away. The period had been, indeed, mostly spent by Randal and Eleanor together; for he loved her too passionately, too devotedly, to bear to be parted from her unnecessarily for a single hour. His whole existence seemed wrapped up in her. Few men do, few men *can* love, as he loved. It was a master and a tyrant passion, swallowing up for the time every other. He had no tastes and few affections, indeed, to afford a change. His passions were all of the darker sort; his wishes, aims, and ambitions, few and personal; so that the generous affection he now felt seemed

to have annihilated those other sentiments and feeling which were so little in harmony with itself.

Every day Randal passed with Eleanor she loved him the better, and became more and more reconciled to the engagement she had made. Even with the most constant hearts, absence and a total breach of intercourse, have great effect. The present assumes its rights over the past; the strongest feelings gradually recede into distance, fade into indistinctness, and lose their agonizing intensity.

But whilst I write this last sentence, I am inclined to hesitate, lest this exhibition should lead to fresh instances of domestic cruelty,—fresh sacrifices offered at the shrine of a too worldly prudence,—fresh hearts ruined by enforced separation. There were moments, it should be told, when the recollections of the past would recur with intense bitterness, but they were resolutely suppressed. The indifference and desertion of the one was contrasted with the devotion and fidelity of the other; and resentment, even in the gentle bosom of Eleanor Wharncliffe, was

not without its due influence in determining the bias of her feelings.

She has been sitting thoughtfully at the drawing-room window,—for the approaching event, now so near as to have assumed the form of an irrevocable certainty, weighed heavily upon her. Any approaching change of importance is awful to the sensitive. Eleanor habitually looked forward to the irrevocable with awe. Any change was in itself alarming; she had more fortitude than courage, and always preferred the evils which she knew to the evils in possibility.——

She sat there, looking out upon the flower-garden, where the crocuses and snowdrops were beginning to peer, and where a few mezereon-trees were putting forth their blossoms—watching the effect of the high March wind, as it swept the flying clouds athwart the sky, bowed the heads of the noble trees with which her father's park was adorned, or swept in loud gusts through the wood, which on one side approached the house very closely.

Everard and his two friends were in the room, standing at the fireplace, laughing

and talking. Everard every now and then casting a glance at the thoughtful face or his sister, with a sort of irritating feeling of dislike and dissatisfaction. There was a shade of melancholy generally discernible when the countenance was in repose, that always inclined him to feel angry. He had got a suspicion into his head, not very uncommon with characters of little feeling when they come in contact with those of much sensibility, that Eleanor's melancholy was somewhat affected, and displayed in order to excite interest; and truly it *did* make Eleanor extremely interesting to those who, unlike Everard, could sympathize with such a character, or justly discern between truthfulness and pretence. Everard saw coarsely, even when he saw justly; but his impressions in general might be called prejudices rather than opinions, and were merely the result of his own fancy and tempers. Where he liked, all was right; where he disliked, all wrong. His, was the jaundiced eye of prejudice, and he had taken a prejudice against Eleanor.

He kept watching that sweet, thought-

ful girl's face, during the intervals of the trifling conversation about matches, horses, and game-preserves which he was keeping up with his friends—with an impatience, amounting almost to anger. At last, upon the two young men adjourning to the stable, to offer their opinion upon the sprain in a favourite horse's shoulder, he broke out,—"Eleanor, what can you be thinking of? I have been watching you this half-hour, and you look as dolorous as the woman who sat eating herself up with green and yellow melancholy upon a monument. I wish you had something really to plague yourself about, like my mare's confounded sprain, and you'd know, perhaps, what you would be at."

"I am sorry your horse is hurt, Everard," she answered, gently turning her soft countenance towards him. What odd creatures some brothers are; that sweetness, which would have subdued any other man in the world only provoked him.

"Are you? I am very much obliged to you. Much you care about it. I wish to heaven, Eleanor, I could once see you look at one without that everlasting soft

smile upon your face, or speak upon any one single occasion above your breath! Oh how wearied I should be if my wife were always looking so lackadaisical and poetical! But, thank goodness, there is no danger of my lighting upon anything of your genus—for I never saw a woman in the world the least like you, and if I did I should fly her like the plague. Commend me to a fine, dashing, saucy girl; and, thank heaven! there are swarms of them to be found in the world."

Eleanor was sadly too sensitive to Everard's rough handling. She was spirit-broken, to a certain degree; her temper was too invariably soft, her feelings too acutely sensitive. She wanted hardening. But as temperate exercise braces, and too violent exertion relaxes, so his too rough treatment subdued and weakened her spirits, instead of arousing and nerving them.

She tried to smile, however, at this sally; and saying, "It is well girls in general are more to your taste than I am," turned again to the window, and thought of Lord Lisburn's grace, sweet-

ness, and spirit, and of Randal Langford's earnest and fervent affection, and wondered within her gentle self whether any woman would be found to be pleased with her brother, and whom he could make happy. Perhaps he divined something of what was passing in her mind, for he continued his attack with increasing ill-humour. Now Everard was one of those gay, rattling, delightful young men who could not endure the least contradiction. He was good-humour itself—all that was pleasant and amusing, when he was himself pleased and amused; but as surly as a lugged bear when the opposite happened to be the case. He had been a good deal put out of humour by the sprain in his favourite mare Nell's left shoulder, and had been rating his groom most soundly about half an hour or so before he had come into the drawing-room. Then it was a March day in the country, and there was nothing to be done. And it was moreover a windy day, a mood in the weather which he always particularly hated; and it was a day of bustle about things which did not immediately concern himself; and

he wanted something to quarrel with, for want of something else to do; so he went on—

"I sometimes wonder, Eleanor, whether Randal Langford will get tired at last of the *toujours perdrix* of your invincibly sweet humour. I could not myself live upon honey-comb for a day. So give me a nice tart, variety of humour, sometimes in, sometimes out, sometimes sweet, sometimes sour; a flash of spirit, or even the lowering cloud of downright ill-humour—Anything for a change—anything for a change, Eleanor."

She said nothing, but seemed to be intent upon watching what was passing outside the window.

"Do you hear, Eleanor?—Is it impossible to get a word out of you?—What is a husband to do with himself upon a rainy day, if he cannot get up a quarrel with his wife? Come, say something.—Tell me what you mean to entertain Randal Langford with to keep you both from dying of ennui at that gloomy Ravenscliffe in such weather as this?—Come Eleanor—What can you be looking at?"

"He seems to have lost his way," said Eleanor.

"Who?—What?—Where? Halloo! an event. Who's lost his way? I see nobody."

"Do you not see a man in an old tattered great-coat, with a handkerchief tied across his face, coming by the large oak there? Now he is behind the trunk. Now, now you see him!"

"See him! Yes," disdainfully; "I see him plain enough—Some wandering vagabond or other. What business has he trespassing there? I've a good mind to set the dogs upon him."

"Pray don't do that, Everard. He may be somebody in distress—he is probably in distress. See how fast the snow is beginning to fall, and driving against the trees.—No one who was not in distress would be out upon such a day."

"He has no business here. And if it were not a rather too disagreeable thing to go out in such a *bourrasque* as this, I would have at him, depend upon it."

"He has got upon the carriage-road now, and is making his way to the house.

He is out of sight. You need not trouble yourself."

Presently a servant opened the door, and said Miss Wharncliffe was wanted; upon which Eleanor rose and left the room. Her brother remained standing at the window, watching the clouds, which now discharged themselves in sudden downfalls of sleet and rain, which were carried rapidly forward by brief intermitting gusts of wind.

Now, it must be known that active charity was not exactly the order of the day at Lidcote Hall. Lady Wharncliffe was too completely a woman of one world to trouble herself much with the wants and necessities of that other world from which, by fortune and station, she was so far removed; and as for Sir John Wharncliffe, he was hard-hearted, careless, and full of his own occupations and pleasures; so that anything like attention to the wants or claims of the poor, upon or about his estate, never entered into his head. The current adage, that property has its duties as well as its advantages, he troubled himself not with. He enjoyed

his advantages to the utmost in every way, and never thought of the accompanying duties. As a magistrate, he reprobated vagrants and vagrancy,—was a stickler for prompt and severe punishment, and regarded every poor man with a sort of secret hostility,—as an incipient thief or poacher. So, except the customary ox killed at Christmas, and customary blankets distributed by the housekeeper, — a matter rather of ostentation than benevolence,—little enough had been done for the poor at Lidcote Hall, at least, during the present reign.

When Eleanor, however, after the long absence of the family, returned as a thoughtful woman to the place she had left as a thoughtless child, her first endeavour was to alter this system of things. The uneasy state of her mind, perhaps, it was, that led her first to endeavour to find subjects of attention and occupation out of herself; but she had not long begun her visits among the poor before she found the real interest of the occupation, and began to occupy herself about their wants and their welfare from far

better motives than a desire to employ herself. Pure benevolence, and a most anxious desire to do good, succeeded to the wish of finding a dissipation for thought. She had, in a very little time, become the adviser, medical and spiritual, of the poor women who lived in a scattered village outside the park, upon the other side of the wood, which, as I have said, approached near the house. For the house was not situated in the centre, but rather towards the verge of the park, upon that side,—a circumstance which very much favoured Eleanor's plans of usefulness.

At any other period, these active exertions would probably have been objected to, and perhaps altogether forbidden, upon the part of Sir John Wharncliffe, who not only hated to busy himself about the poor, but, as I have observed often to be the case, could not bear any other persons to employ themselves in the performance of duties which he chose to neglect. But in the present state of her affairs, Eleanor was in such high favour, that few things she might have desired to ask

would have been refused her. And, moreover, Sir John regarded her as about so soon to belong to another family, that he troubled himself very little how she spent her time during the small remainder of it that she was to continue a member of his own household.

As for Lady Wharncliffe, who was better acquainted with the real state of her daughter's mind, and was fully aware of the uncertainty of her spirits, she was glad to see her occupied,—glad of every occasion that took her out of doors,—glad when she saw the rosy bloom and the bright eye with which she would often return home, after a cold walk upon one of her charitable expeditions.

"There is a poor man, apparently a traveller, at the door, begs to speak with you, Miss Wharncliffe," the footman had said; and Eleanor, as usual, had followed him to one of the doors at the back of the house, belonging to the servants' apartments.

The man she had seen coming up the walk stood there. He was dressed in a loose, threadbare great-coat; evidently

given in charity, or purchased second-hand; for it was a world too wide and too long, completely enveloped his figure, and fell to his ankles. He had a red checked handkerchief tied round the lower part of his face, so as completely to conceal that portion of his features; and an old hat, worn with age, pulled down over his eyes.

She had her purse in her hand, and came lightly stepping, with her usual soft grace of motion, down the passage, looking very beautiful, for her colour was a little raised, her eyes beamed with benevolent intention, and her lovely soft hair was somewhat carelessly blown about her face.

"What do you want with me, good man?" she began. "You seem to be a stranger—are you in distress?"

The eyes of the beggar were fixed upon her, gleaming from beneath the shadow of his slouched hat, in a strange, passionate sort of manner, which she, however, was far from observing. He did not answer at the moment—it seemed as if some internal struggle was going on—when at last he spoke, his voice was hoarse and trembling;

and, as it came through the folds of his muffling handkerchief, scarcely articulate.

"I *am* a stranger, and in very great distress . . . . I have heard of Miss Wharncliffe's universal benevolence; I come to cast myself upon it."

He took out a little paper; it was written in the hand of the mistress of the little inn, in the next village; a respectable woman, whom Eleanor was very well acquainted with—and who, indeed, being from her position somewhat elevated above the people around her, yet most perfectly acquainted with their wants and characters—assisted her very much in her deeds of charity, and officiated for her a little, in the character of almoner.

The words written upon the paper were few, and as follows:

"Honoured Miss,—This will come to your hand by the bearer, a stranger, who arrived here yesterday. He seems above the common sort, by his way of speaking and manner; he is in great distress. His wife, a sweet young creature, of about seventeen, can't be more, is fallen desperately ill at a house a little way off.

It is something of a runaway match. The poor soul, they mourns about father, and mother, and being forgiven; and is most troubled in mind, and sore sick in body. Would you please just step her way, and give her a drop of comfort? Such as none but you, honoured lady, can give. Your obedient servant to command,

MARGARET HOLLINGSWORTH."

The man watched the countenance of Eleanor anxiously, whilst she read this little dispatch; and, as she folded it, said, with eyes the most beseeching, and in a voice trembling with anxiety:

"Will Miss Wharncliffe come? The most miserable of human beings implores her merciful assistance!"

"Oh! yes, I will come. You go back to your poor wife, and I will be at Mrs. Hollingsworth's almost as soon as you can be. Tell your poor young wife, that anything I can do for her shall be done. Comfort her as well as you can."

So spoke the sweet angel voice, whilst the lovely, soft blue eyes were brimfull of tender compassion.

The man gazed at her earnestly—wistfully—sadly—sighed, and saying—

"Your goodness is great. Heaven for ever bless you!"—turned, and hurried away.

Everard saw him depart by the road which led through the wood to the village, and having seen him safely out of sight, was satisfied so far. Yet he continued still looking out of the window, and presently Eleanor, in her walking bonnet and veil, wrapped up in a warm cloak, was seen going down the same way.

He thought it an odd thing for her to be out upon such a day, but fancied she was only going to take a blow, as she used to call it, and come back again; she, however, kept walking on, till he lost sight of her in the wood; and though he remained standing where he was nearly twenty minutes, she did not reappear. This excited his attention. He began to wonder what she was about. Why she had gone out upon such a day as this; and knowing her habits of visiting among the sick and wretched,—of which, by the way, he thoroughly disapproved—began to connect her disappearance with that of the vagrant.

This made him rather uneasy; and after some time had been passed between hesitation at exposing himself to the disagreeable weather, and a something between curiosity and anxiety as to what had become of Eleanor, he took his hat and followed down the way she had taken.

Eleanor, meanwhile, following the carriage-way, which passed through the centre of the wood—which was a thick oak wood, rendered almost impervious by the neglected growth of underwood for many years—found her way as rapidly as she could, folding her cloak closely round her, to shroud her from the wind, and from the coldness of the bleak, showery weather.

She walked straight forward, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. The wood was thick and lonely, and in one direction extended to a great distance; but she never felt the slightest apprehension in traversing it by this carriage-road, it being terminated by the lodge and gates, and the carriage-road itself of no very great length; so that at almost any point in it a person calling out might have

been heard either from the house or the lodge.

The sides of this road were, as I have told you, rendered almost impervious by the thick growth of underwood, holly, beech, and hazle, which formed almost an impenetrable wall of branches upon either side, through which, at intervals, little paths diverged, which plunged into the depths of the thickest and most lonely parts of the wood.

She had just passed a group of dark holly-trees—indeed I might almost call it a grove of these evergreens through which one of these little paths was carried—when she thought she heard a footstep close behind her. Some one evidently must have come upon the road from the side by-path. She did not feel frightened at first, yet felt inclined to quicken her pace, when suddenly her arm was seized by a most determined grasp from behind; and before she knew where she was, she was rapidly forced into the path cut through the hollies, down a little precipitous bank, which suddenly occurred at that place, through the thickets, on and

on, and all with a rapidity that took away her breath, and a force she found irresistible.

Terrified to death, she strove in vain to disentangle herself; the hand which held her arm pressed it like an iron vice, impelling her vehemently forward; but the man, whoever he might be, contrived so to keep behind her, that it was impossible for her to get a glimpse of his face or figure, and he forced her forwards without uttering a word. The rapidity with which she was thus hurried on so entirely took away her breath, that it was impossible for her to cry out; indeed, she felt herself to be fainting, and was sinking to the ground, when the person who held her, seeming to become aware of this, threw his other arm around her, almost lifted her from the ground, and carried her on, until she was entirely lost in the mazes of this large thick wood, into whose remoter solitudes she had never penetrated, and therefore knew not in the least where she was. The paths crossed and intersected each other in every direction, and her tormentor seemed purposely to

choose the most intricate and narrow. At last, after he had thus forced her on, till they must have gone a very considerable way, he suddenly stopped where a little grassy glade was perfectly encompassed and shut in by thick hollies and brambles, and there, loosing hold of the arm which he had grasped so tightly, tore down the handkerchief from his face, rent open his heavy great coat, tossed his hat wildly from his head, and falling down upon his knees before her, clasped his arms passionately round hers, and in a voice which seemed to issue from the very depths of the soul, exclaimed,—"Eleanor!"

She stood there like one paralysed. Excessive terror—terror under which she felt every moment almost ready to expire, —yielded at once to a more overwhelming emotion. But the revolution of feeling was too great; she turned pale, sick—and fainted dead away into his arms. He held her there a moment pressed to his heart, in such an agony of love and joy! Love so inexpressible!—joy beyond words—to have succeeded in getting her there— He scarcely seemed to feel alarmed by the

state in which she lay,—the tumult of delight was too absorbing. But soon that ecstasy yielded to anxiety and terror for her. He knelt down by her side as there before him she lay. He tore open the heavy cloak in which she was wrapped, he wrenched asunder the strings of her bonnet and threw it off, and then all her affluence of fair hair came tumbling over his hands and arms. He had laid her upon the cold, damp ground, and, in hopes to revive her, he now shook from the wet branches a shower of water upon her face.

Soon she opened her eyes, and cast a long, lingering, wistful gaze upon him before she appeared perfectly to recover her recollection; but then, oh how her heart began to beat, as a joy irrepressible in its sweetness flooded over her. A sweet, dreamy ecstasy of joy it was; for she clearly recollected nothing. She only felt he was there, and she with him. She felt as one already among the dead. He all this time was kneeling down by her side, tenderly chafing her cold hands in his, and every now and then bending down and kissing the silken tresses of

fair hair which lay scattering upon the grass.

This dreamy state of half-recollection lasted not long with Eleanor. Slowly, like indistinct slumbers, by degrees shaping themselves into substantial forms, the events of the morning began to return to her memory. She knew she was not dead,—she knew she was in no dream,—and she was aware where she was, and with whom.

Then she drew her hand from his,—strove to rise, but was unable as yet to do more than turn upon one side, and rest upon her elbow, in the attitude of Correggio's Magdalene. But as she lay there, her eyes were not bent down; they looked up into his face, and there was a sweet severity and a melancholy reproach to be read in them. He answered to the look, for she spake not a word.

"Why am I here, Eleanor?—Why am I here?—Why now, and not before? Because I have been basely duped and betrayed. I was persuaded into believing you false, Eleanor. One hour only before I left home I discovered the truth—I

hesitated not one moment, and I am here."

"Ah! ah!—Marcus—Lord Lisburn!"—

"I am not come too late,—I have ascertained that I have not come too late. To-morrow the great sacrifice was to have been completed. Thank God! I am not come too late."

She sighed,—looked at him in a bewildered way,—sighed again,—again looked at him, with a gentle, despairing look of ineffable tenderness,—then cast down her eyes; the colour which had mounted to her cheeks faded, and she became deadly pale.

He flung himself on the grass by her side. He would have put his arm round her, but she gently repulsed him, twining her soft fingers round his hand, and pushing it softly away. She would not even suffer him to hold her hand; she shook her head mournfully as she repulsed him. But she could not speak; it was impossible for her to articulate a word.

"Acknowledge only this, my love," he went on vehemently, "I know I am not too late. You may be the affianced bride, but you are not the wife of Randal

Langford, and never, never,—so help me, Heaven!—shall be."

She shook her head in such a sad, sad, sorrowful manner.

"Do I understand that mournful shake of the head? Yes, yes, I do. You never, never will be Randal Langford's wife. You, Randal Langford's wife!—Perish all of us first!"

"No—yes—don't talk so, Marcus—Lord Lisburn—don't—don't——"

"Talk so! but I will talk so, Eleanor; for am I not come, my sweetest love, to rescue you—rescue you from a fate any one who knows Randal Langford would shudder at? You, his! No, no! I am come, and to claim you for my own,—my betrothed of Heaven,—my own by every sacred tie,—my own—own—own! For are not our hearts one, Eleanor?"

"Ah!—ah! Don't—don't! Oh Marcus! Oh Lord Lisburn!"

"Have we not exchanged hearts?—Have you not mine, and have I not yours? Have you ever taken it back again? No, Eleanor, no! I know you never *have.* I see it in your eyes—I feel it here. Your

hand and your promise you may have given to that dark and detested being; but your heart is mine—was mine—is mine!—ever shall be mine! Deny it, sweet girl, if you will; I never, never shall believe you. You are mine—mine own—my Eleanor, no one's but mine! Sweet love! Come—come; don't cast down those dove-like eyes,—Don't turn that lovely head away. Oh Eleanor! time presses; let us have done with this farce of disguises. My soul's idol! I know that you love me."

Thus he ran on, whilst her poor heart quivered and trembled at the sound of that dear, that well-known voice. For a few moments—forgive her!—she yielded to that dream of felicity; for a few moments forgot her vows, forgot her duties, forgot Randal Langford—his deep attachment, his intense despair. She could be sensible of nothing but the wild dream of rapture which passed over her, as Marcus uttered words the truth of which forced itself upon her heart, and gave her at once the ecstatic assurance that he ever had loved, and that he loved her still.

But the dream of passion lasted but for a moment; all that was right, that was womanly, that was honourable, that was saintly within her, resumed its force; and again drawing away her hand, which he had clasped, she struggled for speech, and at last got out these trembling words,

"Marcus, it is too late: we must not do a wrong thing."

"A wrong thing! What do you call a wrong thing?"

"Breach of honour; I have given my promise."

"Promise to whom?—promise to what? Listen to me, Eleanor," he said, endeavouring to curb his impetuosity, and to speak gravely and calmly. "Promises, in a case like this, are void by the consent of all the world, when either party discovers that the object of them is unworthy. Listen to me, Eleanor; you will be a very wretch if you marry this man. I knew him at College—I marked him well. He was the most ill-conditioned, ill-natured, ill-tempered brute that ever sat down to commons. When I tell you

that I had the honour of horsewhipping the rascal for his insolence,—and to the satisfaction, I verily believe, of every man, high or low, at Cambridge, — you will, perhaps, do me the honour to believe there was some foundation for the ill esteem in which I hold him; and——"

"You—Did *you?*"

"Nay—You cannot have heard the story before."

"Yes, Marcus, I have—And I honour Randal Langford for one thing, at least."

"Oh, I understand!—That his *principles* would not allow him to fight—Is not that it? I'll be sworn it is. So like you, my sweetest, enthusiastic Eleanor. But, let me tell you this: the man, whose principles will not allow him to fight, ought not, behind that masked battery, to have allowed himself to scatter his venomous shafts with impunity. The man who does not intend to stand to the consequences of his words, ought to be careful what those words are. The man, resolved not to *give* satisfaction, should never *take* it away—or he will get horsewhipped!—horsewhipped!—horsewhipped!

Oh!—I hear the delicious sound still—as it whistled through the air, paying off his dastardly insolence to the score. And how the fellows chuckled!—Ay, old and young, Dons and all—The very heads of colleges—trying to look grave and scandalized. And how they chuckled!—For he was hated by every one of them."

Eleanor grew very pale—Eleanor turned livid, as he went on.

"Such an odious wretch! Not contented with flying at high game — not content with attacking the noble and the wealthy, the distinguished and the brave, there was not a poor sizar—there was not a timid, raw lad from the country —a poor devil, toiling out body and soul upon a scholarship of twenty pounds a year, but Langford must have his fling at him. Oh!—I thrashed him for the whole University!"

"You did, did you?" exclaimed a voice; "Then, take that for your reward!"

And a man dashed out from the thicket, and endeavoured, with one blow, to fell Lord Lisburn to the ground. He reeled; but, quick as lightning, he was up on his

defence, and retaliated upon his adversary by striking him in the face.

It was Everard; who, at this last insult, driven, apparently, almost mad, called passionately to Eleanor,—

"Shameful girl!—Degraded girl!—Execrable deceiver! If you have one spark of honour left in you, Eleanor, get away—go away! You—you! Another man's wife!"

"Everard, Everard!—Marcus, Marcus,—have done! He is my brother—it is my brother, Marcus! Have done, have done! Oh, I have been very wrong! Oh! Marcus, let him be! For pity's sake—for my sake—for the love of me, Marcus! Marcus!—Let me go, let me go! I beseech you, let me go!"

"If it be your wish to go," said Marcus, proudly, releasing her, as she struggled and implored, from the arm he had impetuously thrown round her, "If it be your wish to be given up to your brother, say so at once."

"Oh, my honour, my duty! Oh, Marcus, let me go! Go you, go you!—We must part for ever!"

"Hold off, young man!" cried Lord Lisburn, passionately, to Everard; "I tell you, hold off!—let her speak. If she wish to go with you, I relinquish her at once; if not, die we will, but never part. Speak, Eleanor Wharncliffe!—choose between your brother and me. If me—Please God! I will defend you against the world. If him—I have nothing more to do or say."

She cast on him such a look. To his dying day he never forgot it—but she gave her hand to her brother Everard, and left the thicket by the path which led upwards towards the house. Marcus that minute plunged into the underwood in an opposite direction.

CHAPTER II.

Therefore, child of mortality, love thou the merciful Father;
Wish what the Holy One wishes, and not from fear but affection;
Fear is the virtue of slaves . . . . . .

LONGFELLOW.

BEWILDERED—her whole soul in a whirlwind of confusion, Eleanor, under that first strong impulse, which leads a delicate mind, in a moment of excitement such as this, to resist inclination, and follow what appears to be the side of honour and duty—the more so because it is upon the side of honour and duty that the awful sacrifice of self is demanded—Eleanor, in the agonizing alternative, had given her hand to her brother.

Everard had placed it roughly under his arm, and had immediately dragged her away.

She had cast an imploring look upon Marcus—a look in which all the despair of her soul was painted. He had answered it, as men will answer in such cases, by one of rage and disappointment not to be described; and had at once plunged into the thicket, and disappeared.

No sooner was he gone than her repentance began. The deep, undying regret—the never-dying worm which gnaws the heart—began to feed upon hers. Regret, deep, ineffaceable, unceasing regret, that she had been so hasty—regret for a happiness for ever lost, and through her own act.

For man in his unredeemed state—far, far more, for feeble woman—for any human being wanting that one and strong support, the conviction that even under our own mistakes—when not the result of evil intention—a mightier hand impelling the course of things may be detected—unable to rest in faith upon a wisdom and goodness which, so long as the heart and will are pure, will finally bring good out of evil.

To those unhappy ones wandering thus darkened and deserted through the courses of this world, such regret is indeed a dreadful, dreadful thing. It is an incurable ulceration of the heart, eating away the life.

Sweet, gentle, excellent Eleanor! endowed by nature with such generous aspirations after the good and the beautiful in thought and action; of so pure, so docile, so self-sacrificing a temper; possessing such a noble freedom from self-seeking in word or deed; such a tender sympathy in the sorrows of others; such an uncomplaining patience in enduring her own! In her the evils arising from the very imperfect religious training that she had received, had not been exemplified, as they too often are, by the absence of self-restraint and self-discipline; for, in truth, her character was by nature so harmoniously blended; so filled with impulses for all that was pure and good, that it wanted little of that after-fashioning which we all, more or less, from that higher life receive.

What was wanting here, as you will have

observed, was moral strength. Strength to inflict as well as to endure pain. There was a weak tampering with the laws of truth and rectitude, instead of the brave esolve to do right, and leave consequences to themselves. Some may, in the pride of their native strength, deem themselves above the necessity of a higher support; but to the susceptible and tender, the poor in spirit, the child-like and lamb-like of this world, great, great is the need of the Good Shepherd's arm. And poor Eleanor felt that need now.

In her misery, where should she turn? In her darkness, where seek light? In her helpless despair, where look for support and consolation? "Out of the depths I called upon Thee." Oh misery! to sink into those depths—those depths of agony in which the overwhelming waters flow over the soul, and all is darkness and misery, and not to be able to cast an imploring eye upwards! Not be able to believe and to experience that there *is* a Power—that there *is* an Almighty pity—an infinite *love*, which suffers not the fluttering sparrow to fall unheeded to the

ground. An infinite love and sympathy from which no poor trembling sufferer, crushed amid the whirling machinery of circumstance—insignificant as he may appear—is excluded. Because, though we are small, He is great—though we are poor, He is rich. Because He is vast, supreme, measureless, infinite in wisdom, might, and magnificence—though we are poor, weak, and miserable—because He is everything, and we are nothing. Those, and those only, who rest upon this Rock know what a stability it gives to the soul—those, and those only, who possess this strength, literally experience the truth of the promise, that "faith shall move mountains."

In the story of Angela—tender, and gentle, and softly susceptible, as poor Eleanor Wharncliffe herself, I have given an instance of the sublime strength thus acquired; in the sweet girl now before us, we must lament a victim of unassisted nature.

Fainting, agonising, half-resisting, half-yielding, her poor heart torn in the wild conflict of opposing feelings, Eleanor yielded to the impelling force of superior

strength, and suffered herself to be dragged forwards by her brother. Every step she took seemed to lacerate her heart afresh,—to rend her, as it were, in twain. Her thoughts, distracted between him, the long and truly loved, from whom every step was separating her, and him whose whole desperate soul she knew to be her own, and the hideous agonies of whose despair, if he lost her, were even in this moment pictured.

But regretful or consenting, looking wistfully backwards or fearfully forwards, it was all one; the strong unrelenting arm of her brother was round her waist, and he, half-supporting, half-carrying, was hurrying her impetuously on, giving her scarcely time to breathe. She began, too, to feel bodily ill, dreadfully exhausted and ill. The cold damp ground upon which she had been laid in her faint, seemed to have chilled the very marrow of her bones, and as the wild excitement of the moment subsided, physical suffering claimed its part; she became deathly cold, and shivered fearfully. Everard felt her trembling and

shaking, and the whole weight of her body resting upon his arm, as if utterly incapable of supporting herself; but not the less did he keep forcing her pitilessly onwards. His great anxiety was to get her into the house before the Langfords should arrive, and smuggle her, if possible, unperceived by any one, into her own room.

Everard was not in general a man of much consideration, but the obvious necessity of keeping what had passed from the knowledge of Randal, if there was to be any chance of the marriage being celebrated the next morning, was evident. He glanced his eyes upon his sister. Her dress and cloak were almost wringing wet with the showers of water Marcus had thrown upon her in her swoon; they were soiled with mud, and her hat, all shapeless, had fallen back from her head, allowing her hair to escape and fall dishevelled about her shoulders. In such a condition she ought not to be exposed to the eyes of any one. What curiosity such an appearance must excite! what endless questionings there would be! It

would be impossible to prevent the secret from, in some degree, escaping, and once put upon the true scent, his jealousy and pride once awakened, the truth would, in all probability, be discovered by Randal Langford, and the consequences would be fatal.

I have said that the wood approached the house very closely upon one side. There was, indeed, a little above the carriage-road which traversed it, a small by-path, opening from the Approach, used by the servants, and leading to their apartments. It was masked by a thick shrubbery, and a private back-door led to it.

At this time of day there was a good chance of entering the house this way unobserved, and to it Everard dragged his sister. Fortunately he proved right in his expectations; they were met by no one, and reached the house without being seen. Everard laid his hand upon the lock of the small back-door,—it yielded,—he entered, still dragging his unresisting burden on: but, as she entered the house, her strength seemed wholly to

fail her, and she sank to the ground. Upon which he turned towards her, lifted her up as one might do a child, flung her over his shoulder, and with as much speed as he could possibly use, carried her up a back flight of stairs, and got her at last, safely, into her own room. Arrived there, he turned quickly round, double-locked the door, and then flung his sister, now quite insensible, upon the bed. She lay there, her eyes closed, and as one dead. He stood by her, offering no assistance, but watching her.

He had been used to see women faint upon very slight occasions, and thought little of that, or of any other of their ailments. Feebleness Everard affected not to believe, insensibility he did not understand. Suffering he had little comprehension or pity for; he was a hard selfish young man; and such hardness and selfishness, when displayed by the young, is usually, I think, more complete, as it is certainly more revolting, than in the aged.

Seeing, however, after the lapse of a little time, that she did not come to her-

self, he stooped down and untied the strings of her heavy cloak; then he undid her bonnet, that he took off and flung away; and lastly opened the window, and exposed her to the cold, damp blast, which went whistling and sighing dismally round the house. Seeing that these measures were likewise without avail, and that the pale beautiful form lay still lifeless upon the bed, he began to rub her hands, and endeavour to restore animation in that manner. His own hands were hot and dry with fever and with rage, and as he rubbed the delicate palms, a tingling life began faintly to revive in them. At last the bosom heaved slowly and heavily two or three times, and then Eleanor opened her eyes.

"Where am I? What has happened?"

"You are in your own bedchamber, Eleanor; where, by the greatest luck in the world, I have got you, without meeting a living soul. It is a piece of good fortune you could hardly have expected, and certainly have little deserved—but it is everything for you. Not a living soul but myself can have the least suspicion of

what has passed. Keep your own counsel, as I most assuredly will keep mine, and everything will go on, as if this accursed morning had never been."

"Everything go on? ——"

Everything go on! A new horror crept over her, and she began to shake and to shudder. She had in the hurry of her passionate emotions only pictured to herself Randal's horrible despair if she left him—only dwelt upon the breach of duty, the breach of promise she was committing; she had not glanced at anything further. She had felt it as an impossibility that after what had passed, anything further could go on between them. The idea of being called upon to fulfil her engagements with one man, when her heart, oh! how entirely! entirely! was wholly and eternally another's, had never entered her mind.

"I wish you could stop yourself shivering and shaking so, Eleanor," said her brother impatiently; "I want to get your cloak off, for it is dripping wet; and to make you decent, so that one might call on your maid without exciting that worthy

personage's inherent and irresistible curiosity. Do try for a little self-command —You will betray everything, else."

She looked up at him. He answered to the look thus,

"You cannot hesitate. . . . ."

She did not speak. She could not, but he again read the expression of her face, and again answered it by sitting down, and saying, with an air of determination, "Eleanor, I believe I understand the meaning of those looks very well—It is what I ought to expect, and to be prepared to resist. Of all the women it has ever been my lot to meet with—and I have known as many weak, capricious, and ignorant what they would be at—as any man—I must say I never met your equal, Eleanor.

"Throughout the whole of your life," he went on, "ever since you ceased to be a mere child, it has been the same tiresome story; you would and you would not. And now we are come to the climax. You love one man, that is plain." Here the colour flashed into her death-like face,—but immediately to fade again;

"and have been loving him in secret all this time; I have not a doubt of it. Yours is not a character to get the better of a foolish passion, You have been nursing it, and weeping about it, and sentimentalising over it in secret, I'll be bound, all this time. Oh! I know a fond woman's way—And yet, you have, just like the rest of them, in spite of all these heroic ideas of constancy, in all good faith and honour accepted another man without scruple, and, in short, have promised your hand to Randal Langford. Randal," he went on, speaking more and more superciliously, "is in my opinion a mere dupe, sensible fellow as he is, to be thus taken in by your soft looks; but we are all of us fools and ninnies in love,—so let that pass. However, right or wrong,—ninny or not, he is devoted to you. He is coming here in a few hours, full of anticipations of happiness, and these you have encouraged him to form in every way a woman could. And now, because this rascally Lord Lisburn, who has treated you—as we all know—like a scoundrel, so long as he felt himself secure of you—pleases to come and disturb

your mind by suddenly re-appearing upon the boards when he imagines he is about to lose you—because this flirt—this male coquette—this fine Irish hero of yours chooses to play out his shameful part to the last, what are you wanting to do? Nay, I verily believe by your face, you are determined to do it. Abandon Randal Langford—plunge him into a distress; which, absurd or not, as one may think it, will have a fatal effect upon him — I can tell you that,—Eleanor; but what care you for his fate. And why and wherefore this behaviour, if you please? Is there anything really altered from what it was a few hours ago? You know as well as I do, nothing is. If you would be honest, you would confess that you loved this Irish fellow the best of the two; not only this morning, but the past morning, and every morning of your engagement, and would have done so upon the very morning of your wedding-day, even if this confounded meeting had never taken place. You know you cannot help secretly loving him best. In all honour and good faith to Randal Langford, all I ask is, be

it understood—well, well don't look at me in that way, for I am sure it is reasonable enough—just go on doing now as you were ready to do yesterday. No change in the real circumstances of the case has arisen,—except, indeed, that your Lord Lisburn has proved himself to be a greater scoundrel than even those who knew him best gave him credit for. There is a somewhat less reasonable cause for this infatuation than there was, that is all; but let that pass. I repeat, that what you were ready to do this morning, I admit not the slightest reason why you should not be ready to do this evening."

He kept walking up and down the room, pursuing the course of his argument, whilst she listened in a sort of appalled amazement.

"Everything is ready. Randal Langford will be here in a couple of hours. Every one regards you as to all intents and purposes already married. Look upon yourself in that light, and just as you would have acted, had this mad scene taken place after you had been to church, instead of before — and for the love of

heaven! do not, by your insane disregard of all that is loyal, honourable, or rational, plunge the whole of our two families into incalculable misery and confusion."

There was some truth in what he urged after all; little as his way of thinking accorded with her mind.

The horrible tempest that would arise, the dreadful consequences, if she hesitated to fulfil her engagement! The susceptible imagination of Eleanor pourtrayed it to herself but too faithfully. Then the agonies of Randal's despair and disappointment; she could not be insensible to that. She could not help feeling for Randal, even in the midst of this fearful sense of alienation. In spite of all, there was a something within her breast that still pleaded for Randal.

She lay there, astounded, bewildered; then she began, though in a composed manner, to reflect. She was so utterly, so hopelessly miserable, that nothing could make her more miserable. She felt so sunk in body, so lost in mind, that it seemed vain to attempt further resistance. Like the drowning wretch who

having battled with the waves, clinging desperately for life to the last plank, exhausted with his agonising efforts, at length yields to his fate, and closing his eyes, suffers the waters to overwhelm him,—so she felt as if the power of further resistance was at an end, that she must yield to the irresistible force that impelled her, and suffer the current of events to sweep her unresistingly where it would. She was unable to answer her brother; he, of course, chose to interpret her silence his own way. Presently she closed her eyes, and turning away from him, seemed inclined to sleep; upon which he added not one word more, good or bad, to what he had urged, but drawing the blanket over her, turned from the bed, unlocked the door, and left her to herself. He had not, however, gone far, before something struck him, and he returned, and just put his head in at the door again, and said,

"I shall tell them you very imprudently went out to see some poor beggar in distress, were caught in a heavy shower, and, moreover, fell down in the

slippery mire—that I found you getting along as well as you could, with your heavy dripping cloak wrapped round you; and that I brought you in, and sent you to bed immediately, seeing that you were half dead with cold and fatigue. This will account for everything. Take care and keep to the same story."

And she was at last left in peace.

Such peace as there was for her, poor thing! The peace of helpless despair. The peace of those who suffer without resistance. Such peace as the poor Irish victim of starvation and fever experiences when he gives the matter up, and lies down under a hedge to die.

She lay there stupid, passive, almost indifferent, and even this was a something like rest. The agonies she had endured during the last hour had been so terrible that there was something almost approaching to comfort in being comparatively at rest, in feeling that there was nothing further left to do, no further effort to make; that others must act, and she be but as a senseless clod in their hands.

She was, indeed, so entirely exhausted,

that her mind seemed to have lost the power of dwelling steadily upon any object. The figure of Marcus, as he bounded into the thicket, even this apparition seemed to fade and become faint. She could almost have believed that she cared not for him nor anything. But oh! the awakening from this insensibility!

Eleanor had lain in the state above described for, maybe, about a couple of hours, when she was aroused by the sound of carriage-wheels approaching, and by hearing the hall door-bell ring.

Then she knew that the Langfords were come.

She did not, however, as many might have been expected, go into a fresh agony of agitation at this. No; she was still in the same state of deadness of feeling. She seemed only aroused to a perception of the necessity of getting up, arranging her dress, and preparing herself to go down-stairs and meet her affianced lover.

She turned round, stretched out her hand, and tried to ring the bell.

The action made her sensible how very ill she was. Whilst she had lain so perfectly still, she had not been aware of the consequences which the wet clothes, the chill, and the dreadful excitement she had undergone had produced.

No sooner did she attempt to move than a violent headache set in, so desperately violent that she could scarcely raise her head from her pillow. She had, however, just sufficient power left to seize the bell-pull, and Cary soon appeared, and was instantly pouring forth loud exclamations at the state in which she found her young mistress.

"My goodness, Miss Wharncliffe, why you are wetted through and through! What *have* you been about? Where *can* you have been? And your cloak all mud and mire, I never saw such a mess; and here is your bonnet,—why, one might think it had been dragged through the kennel. My stars and garters!—but here's a pretty to-do. And to-morrow the wedding-day. For goodness' sake let me

get off your wet things and fetch the warming-pan, and put you snugly into bed for an hour or so. I warrant, then, you'll be better, and able to get up and meet your bridegroom. La! what a handsome chariot he has brought for you. They are all a-praising it in the servants' hall; and Thomas,—that's Mr. Randal's man—looks as proud as a peacock about it; for you know they were never very famous in the equipage line at Ravens-cliffe. But Love works wonders as they say."

Whilst Cary prattled on much faster than usual, in the pride of her heart, exulting in the prospect of the coming marriage, Eleanor suffered herself to be undressed, and put into a warm bed.

To lie down and to be quiet was such a luxury! Yes, her need of rest was so extreme, that stupified as she was, she was not insensible, even at that moment, to the luxury—the extreme luxury—in her then state, of being quiet and being warm.

She was not allowed, however, to re-main so. Presently Lady Wharncliffe hurried in.

"My sweetest child! What! A-bed! Well, it is, perhaps, the wisest thing you can do. Everard has told us all about it. How could you be so silly, dear child? But it is dear of you to remember the poor the very day before your wedding, when most girls' heads are only stuffed with nonsense and fine clothes. You should have seen how those dark eyes of Randal's glistened when Everard told him of it. He has a world of feeling. You two sentimental ones will do charmingly together. I, perhaps, might think it rather a bore—and like *this* testimony of the young gentleman's affection a degree better. See, love!"—opening a case she held in her hand,—"what a lovely set of pearls he has brought you! I declare it's quite edifying to see those Puritan Langfords so alive to the pomps and vanities of this world. I never expected the least mite of a trinket from Randal, and thought you would have to go as bare of all wicked ornament as a Quaker; but I had only to let drop—I assure you, quite undesignedly—something about how nice it

was to be loaded, as your father did me, with presents, when, lo and behold! the consequences. He perfectly dotes, Eleanor. I vow you ought to be proud. Such a stern, serious, disdainful, haughty young man, as he was generally esteemed to be, to have turned him as you have," &c., &c.

For thus the happy mother ran on, hoping to make her daughter smile, but Eleanor only became the more pensive. Yet these proofs of Randal's devotion certainly afforded her some pleasure. They seemed to justify to herself the sacrifice of principle and inclination which she was about to make for his sake, and to reconcile to her in some degree this passive submission to her fate.

Her mother prattled on till she had forced a languid smile from the pale trembling lips of her daughter; and then kissing her, she left the room, and returned in haste to the drawing-room to assist in beguiling the time till Eleanor should be able to appear.

CHAPTER III.

> Oh, let no voice of merriment
> Upon the breezes swell;
> But the low and smother'd wailing,
> And heavy funeral bell.
>
> MRS. ACTON TINDAL.

THE party assembled in the drawing-room at Lidcote Hall appeared rather dull and triste for the eve of a wedding—not but what eves of weddings, like other eves of great events, are often heavy things,—but there was more than the natural amount of heaviness or dulness here.

Eleanor's sudden illness threw a damp upon everything and everybody. Sir John Wharncliffe was vexed and inclined to be angry with her for this inopportune head-

ache. What would his rage have been could he have divined the real state of the case! Lady Wharncliffe was fidgetty; Everard restless and uneasy, and looking more worried than he had often been seen to be before. Mr. and Mrs. Langford were conscious of a certain awkwardness and want of cheerful cordiality in the manner of their reception which set them ill at ease; and Randal was disappointed and miserable.

As was natural in his situation, his thoughts, during the whole morning's journey,—the houses being from about thirty to forty miles distant from each other—had been occupied with pictures of happiness. But when he entered the drawing-room at Lidcote Hall, how were all these fair visions dissipated. Instead of the picture his imagination had drawn of Eleanor, blushing and holding back, yet lifting up to him those serene, soft eyes, and welcoming him with a certain sweetness peculiar to them,—he found only Sir John, Lady Wharncliffe, Everard, and his two young friends. And, when he glanced hastily round, and instead of his Eleanor,

met only Lady Wharncliffe, who came forward in a hurried, uncomfortable manner, offering hasty and unsatisfactory excuses for her daughter's non-appearance. His countenance suddenly darkened,—He looked not only disappointed, but displeased—and appearing to pay little attention to the reasons she offered, turned shortly away, and went and sat down at the other end of the room, in haughty, or rather sulky, silence.

Everard watched him with much uneasiness. His secret weighed upon him; and though it was impossible that Randal Langford could have the slightest suspicion of what had just passed, yet the deep gloom which suddenly overcast his countenance at the seemingly simple announcement that Eleanor had a bad headache, and could not yet appear, seemed to Everard an alarming symptom. He began anxiously asking himself whether it were possible that some rumours of the unlucky Cheltenham affair could in any evil hour have reached Ravenscliffe, and awakened in Randal suspicions as to the true state of the case. He went behind

his mother's chair, and began a whispering remonstrance.

"Eleanor *must* come down. You must get Eleanor down. Indeed, Lady Wharncliffe, you must insist upon it."

"But her head is dreadfully bad, Everard; and really she seems so ill, that I have all the fears in the world for her. If she is not suffered to be quiet, I cannot answer for to-morrow—Indeed I cannot."

"Well, you must know best; but look there! Did you ever see such a face as that?—and for a bridegroom, too! Well, mother, if I were you, by fair means or foul, I would get this most provoking girl upon earth down-stairs—if it were but for a quarter of an hour this evening, it would be better."

"Well, I will go up-stairs again, and see what can be done; but really it is a most vexatious business. Who would have thought of her being so insane as to go out upon a day like this. I wish, Everard, you had had the good luck to prevent her."

"I prevent her! I was not set to keep guard over her; and if I had been, she is

not so easily to be ruled. She stole out quite unperceived by anybody; and that wood lies so convenient," added he, in a vexed, ill-humoured tone.

Randal had continued sitting where he had first placed himself; but by-and-by he seemed to feel the ridicule to which this ill-humour exposed him, especially before the two young men, Everard's friends, and he rose from his chair, and, walking towards them, began to attempt entering upon something like a conversation, his face still, however, preserving its dark, troubled, and dissatisfied expression, which the mother and son, aware as they both were, though for different reasons, of the true state of things, watched with increasing anxiety. It was evident that he was deeply offended, and too proudly so to choose to make any further inquiries as to the cause of this unlooked-for absence.

"Do bring her down! You must; you really must, mother," Everard kept repeating.

"I will see what can be done," at last she said, and rose to go; but before leaving the room to chat with Eleanor,

she determined to make an attempt at conciliating Randal. She therefore went up to him with an air the most cordial she could assume, and beckoning him to a distant window, began, in a low voice, to address him thus:

"I am sorry—and yet I am glad to see you so vexed. One cannot help being vexed when one is disappointed; and, to be sure, I should be vexed enough if you were not very *much* disappointed. The sweet girl is very delicate, you know. —You will have to take great care of her when she is from under her mother's wing. It was very foolish of her, and so provoking, this day of all days!—We have had so much sleet, and such incessant showers.—Who could have thought she would have gone out?"

"Gone out!—She surely did not go out upon such a day as this."

"You know what a dear charitable angel she is, and how kind in visiting the poor—and, unluckily, some one who was in a desperate case sent up to her. It was excessively unreasonable, and very wrong; but the poor are so unreasonable

and thoughtless.—Nobody was aware of her intention till she was gone—And through the wood, too! where the drip of the trees makes it a perfect shower-bath. Luckily Everard missed her—heard she was gone out, and followed her; but before he could get her back she was wetted to the skin,—chilled through and through; and, in short, made quite ill."

His countenance began to clear.

"Did you say the poor!—for the poor?" he said, gently.

"To be sure I did. She is such a good little Lady Bountiful. Well, I had her put to bed immediately—or rather her maid had done that, before I heard that anything was amiss—but she has a dreadful headache and some fever; and really, my dear Randal, if you would take my advice, you would not wish her to be disturbed till she has had a little sleep. She is such a delicate creature. Pray ever keep that in mind, or you will have as little patience with these kind of disappointments as men in general have—and that would never do with her."

"I will, indeed, keep it in mind.—Pa-

tient! Will I not be patient? I doubt not that you are right," he said, conquering every remains of the ill-humour, which he began to feel heartily ashamed of. "Are you going to her? Tell her I would not disturb her for the world. But if she cannot come down, beg of her to admit me, be it but for one quarter of an hour this evening—and, in the mean time," taking a small parcel out of his pocket, which contained the splendid *parure* of pearls which had given Lady Wharncliffe so much pleasure, "pray carry her this little preparatory offering—this insignificant gage of affection on my part."

Lady Wharncliffe looked excessively pleased, received the parcel, and immediately left the room; where, after the interview with Eleanor, she speedily returned, and exerted herself in every possible manner to keep up the conversation, and please and amuse a company—not very easy either to please or to amuse—till dinner-time.

Eleanor meanwhile continued to lie upon her pillow, her head in racking pain, and her thoughts in hurried confusion succeeding each other, image following image with fearful rapidity. In truth, she was in a sort of delirious dream; and in no situation to reflect, far less to act.

At last, wearied out, she fell asleep and slumbered away two or three more precious hours, in that deep and almost senseless stupor which succeeds to excessive exhaustion of body and mind.

Several times did Lady Wharncliffe cautiously steal into her room, but still she slumbered on. The gentlemen, at last, came in from dinner, and Randal, making his way hastily to his mother that was to be, asked impatiently.

"Now, may I see her?"

"She has fallen fast asleep—fast, fast asleep—I really think it would not do to disturb her. Her headach was terribly bad, and the hurry of to-morrow, you know——"

"But not to see her at all to-night?"

"Why, if you must see her," said Lady Wharncliffe at last, a sudden thought

striking her, "you shall see her." She had read something of suspicion again in his looks which she did not like. "Step up-stairs with me, without saying a word to any one, and you shall have a glimpse at her as she lies there. But it is a prodigious favour, and we must keep it to ourselves; and you must promise me, after that, to be a good boy, and be quiet."

They went out of the room together. She preceded him up the stairs, and, when they came to the door of Eleanor's room, turned the lock with great caution. Then, her finger raised to impose silence, with a noiseless step she advanced a few paces, and he followed her and found himself in Eleanor's apartment. The chamber was dimly lighted by the fitful blazes of the fire, by which Cary was sitting watching; but the flashes of light, that rose up vividly from time to time, fell upon the bed, and illuminated the face of the sleeper.

There she lay; her beautiful hair, still dishevelled and in disorder, hung in large, heavy masses round her,—her cheek resting upon her hand, her face turned

towards them. She was in a deep slumber. Her beauteous countenance was almost the colour of statuary marble,—so pale and wan it was. The expression of the features, in this state of profound repose, was that of a deep and settled melancholy, pathetic beyond description; and the fire, as it rose and fell, casting sudden flashes of light across the room, gave a strange, unearthly, spectral aspect to it. She looked no longer like the soft Eleanor, with the gentle, tender eyes: she looked haggard—ghastly.

He stood and gazed upon her in silence. Lady Wharncliffe did not like the expression of his face; it was anxious, grave, gloomy, dissatisfied, suspicious. But he uttered not one word; the whole passed in utter silence, interrupted only by a cinder falling now and then from the fire, the rustling of Cary's dress as she moved upon her chair, and the light, scarcely perceptible breathings of the sleeper.

He stood there and gazed intently; the longer he stood there, the more intently—the more anxiously—the more gloomily the more moodily. At last he raised his

eyes, which had been fastened on the bed, and fixed them in a grave, scrutinising manner upon Lady Wharncliffe's face.

She did not feel very well able to stand this scrutiny; neither did she at all feel satisfied with the effect produced by this visit to the sleeping sufferer. When she proposed it, she had thought only of it being the best and readiest method of satisfying Randal's mind as to the reality of Eleanor's indisposition. She had not reflected upon—for, indeed, she had not observed—the deep sadness so indelibly impressed upon her daughter's face; and which sleep only rendered the more obvious, because the more fixed.

The only thing to be done now, it was evident, was to get Randal out of the room as soon as possible; she, therefore, signed impatiently to him that they had better go, and he obeyed without hesitation. But, when they had reached the door, he suddenly returned to the side of the bed, again gazed with intense feeling at the sleeper, and then turning away with a heavy sigh, followed Lady Wharncliffe down-stairs.

Once or twice again he looked at her as they descended, with that scrutinising, suspicious glance which had annoyed her so much in the bedroom; but he uttered not a word. When he re-entered the drawing-room he took a book, and sitting down by the mantel-piece in a corner, out of the way of the rest, began to read, or to pretend to read—for, in truth, not one syllable did he see.

Lady Wharncliffe made vain attempts to maintain even the appearance of cheerfulness throughout the evening;—it would not do. People fell into detached groups; any conversation that arose was carried on in low tones, approaching to whispers. In short, never was wedding-day preceded by a more stupid evening. The absence of the bride seemed to produce more than the natural effect of such an untoward eclipse.

Lady Wharncliffe had left orders with Cary, to let her know as soon as Eleanor should awaken. She wished to see her again before the party separated for the night, and that, if possible, Randal should see her also. She was becoming infected

with the general nervousness herself—depressed with the idea that something amiss would happen. She kept casting uneasy glances at Randal, who continued to sit there, preserving his air of deep seriousness, and the most invincible silence. Now and then she exchanged looks with her son, who was still more anxious than she was, and with far better reason. But no Cary appeared,—Eleanor slumbered on.

The clock struck eleven, the usual time for retiring. Lady Wharncliffe made the accustomed sign to Mrs. Langford, and taking her candle, prepared to light that lady up to her room. Before doing so, however, she bade good-night to the young gentlemen, and going up to Randal, held out her hand, saying, in as light a manner as she could command, "You are quite in a brown study, Randal; what *can* be the matter with you?"

He let fall the hand which held the book, and as he coldly gave her the other, again fixed his scrutinising eyes upon her face; but he said not one word. She read she knew not exactly what in that look. There was more in it than she coul

well decipher. Certainly there was suspicion, there was resentment—but there was deep anxiety; there was sadness beyond description, and yet a certain air of determination.

She turned away, and went out of the room, secretly rejoicing that twelve o'clock was about to strike,—that the time was speeding rapidly away, and that in less than twelve hours more, Randal Langford and Eleanor Wharncliffe would be one.

And thus Eleanor slumbered away the most important hours of her existence,—The hours for self-examination, for decision, for action.—The hours when the destiny of her whole life hung in the balance,—hours, which every principle of duty, as of wisdom, required that she should have spent in the most rigid inquiry into the real state of her feelings—in weighing the consequences of that which she was about to do, and determining irrevocably between the right and the wrong.

Cary, I omitted to say, had aided the effect of bodily and mental exhaustion, by the administration, upon her own responsibility, of a pretty strong dose of sedative medicine. The deep sleep into which Eleanor had been thrown was not, therefore, altogether natural. She slumbered on, however, until between four and five o'clock in the morning; and then the sleeper awoke, and started up in her bed, wondering where she was—what had happened; and the events of yesterday floating into her mind, but all in a confused and uncertain manner, as if in a delirious dream.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when she had fallen asleep; and now, what o'clock was it?—Where was she?—What had happened?—What was about to happen? Oh! her mental vision was sharpened, perhaps, by the excitement of the medicine she had taken; but what had happened—what was about to happen—too soon was cleared from the mists and vapours of her recent heavy slumber, and the past and the future stood before her, revealed in fearful intensity.

Marcus!—Had he really been there? His passionate gestures, his impetuous love, and, above all, his vehement and indignant words—had all this really been? Was it no dream? Had these things taken place really? Had she indeed been with him,—met him once more face to face? Had he come all that way—he whom she thought false—to seek her, and to save her?—He who, they all told her, had deserted and slighted her? And had she had the heart to leave him? Marcus! Marcus! that loved her so—that she loved so! And all for what, and for whom? For Randal—Randal Langford! The man so hated and despised by him—by him! And oh! then arose with dreadful power those words—those fatal words!—

"I thrashed him for the University."

Was Randal, then, utterly unworthy of the esteem she had felt for him? Utterly unworthy of the sacrifice she was about to make for him? Was he in truth what the indignant Marcus had painted him? And oh! that generous, high-spirited, loving Marcus! Was she to forsake him — leave him—leave him

for ever? And, for such a man as this? It was thus her dreadfully excited feelings represented things in this distracting moment.

Marry Randal!—Abandon Marcus for ever! Marry Randal! — Impossible! Eleanor was no longer the poor, passive, feeble slave of circumstance—she was a highly excited being! Excited to an almost unnatural pitch of resolution by anguish of mind, and exasperated by the effect of the medicines she had taken. She started upright in her bed; she looked round. All was so dark. The night lamp had gone out; the fire was extinguished. Cary seeing her young mistress so comfortably asleep, herself thoroughly tired out with the business of the day, and anxious to be up and fresh early in the morning, had left her and was gone to bed.

Eleanor was quite alone, in the awful darkness and silence of the deep night, when every one is asleep, and stillness the most profound weighs upon the air. And the morrow was her wedding-day! And she had been slumbering all the

precious hours away. But it was morning already—not to-morrow,—oh! no—no—not to-morrow—to-day!—to-day!—The morning is already come,—the very morning. Ah! the stable clock strikes. One — two — three — four — five! It is five!—Five o'clock!—And at ten they are to be married.

She has started up in her bed again at the sound of the clock—shivering, and shaking, and looking wildly round. Then a dim faint twilight began to dawn through the apartment, filling it with spectral lights and shadows. And she knew that it was the approaching sun—the coming day which wore that fearful aspect, so shadowy and ghostly. And the day before it was utterly past—gone to join those days whose history is closed for ever! And oh! that day before—that day so swiftly speeded by—yet leaving indelibly impressed, once and for ever, the terrible vestiges of its flight. She had seen him then—Seen him—in the body again! Him! whom she had never

thought in this world to behold more. Seen him! Passionate, earnest, devoted, in all his wild and vehement sweetness. Him beside whom, all other mortal men were but as deformed ice statues to her. And she had heard from his lips, and read upon his ardent feeling countenance, the expression of a love such as in her happiest moments she had never even ventured to dream of. And he had claimed her as his own—claimed her by the indefensible right of love! And what had *she* done—left him! forsaken him—Suffered her cruel brother to bear her away. In her weakness and her cowardice, and her contemptible want of self-assertion, suffered the deep—the strong—the sacred tie to be torn asunder. And oh! she saw it all now—saw it as it was to haunt her evermore. That wild, reproachful look, as he turned away, and vanished from her sight between the branches of the thicket—lost to her for ever and ever!

"Oh, Marcus! Marcus!" was her heart's wild cry; "return again my Marcus! Come again, my Marcus!

They are going to bury me alive. Come again! Come again, my Marcus!"—and then she wrung her hands as there she sat upright in her bed, her hair streaming over her shoulders, her eyes starting from their sockets wildly—lifted up in unutterable despair—vainly appealing to she knew not what—and there was none to answer. And then she bent that poor face of hers over her wringing hands, and a flood, a very torrent of tears rushed forth, mingled with hysterical sobs and smothered cries. It was all she could do to prevent herself rushing from her bed, falling upon the floor, tearing her hair, and shrieking aloud.

Oh, well spoke the poet: "To be weak is to be miserable."

What availed all this agony and passion? There was nothing to be done. She wanted the energy which might, by a desperate act of courage, yet have saved her. She had been cowed when a child — Dire misfortune! She had lost the faculty of opposition even in the most just acts of self-defence. She had been so accustomed to be passive, that passive

was all she could be even in the greatest emergency. She had all the gentle force of patience, but it was impossible for her to exercise the heroic constancy of resistance.

Six o'clock strikes. What matters the striking of the clock? What matters the faint streaking of the coming dawn? What matters it that there is time still for action to one who cannot act? What avails the warning that time is running out apace, when she dares not take the warning.

As the clock struck again, she threw herself upon her pillow, face downwards, endeavouring to bury her head in it, and shut out the warning uttered by that terrible clock.

Endeavouring to stupify herself, stun herself, and to forget that time was, time is, and——there is time no longer! For seven o'clock strikes, and the room-door opens, and Cary presents herself, carrying in bridal vestments.

They are to be married at ten. The carriages are to be at the door at a quarter-past nine; and what are two

hours and a quarter in the preparations for such an event? She raised her head as she heard the door open, and then sank back again, and lay there motionless, like one dead, her eyes only alive, watching the apparition, as it seemed to her, of Cary, now entering the room.

Cary, not wishing to disturb her, whether asleep or awake, sooner than was absolutely necessary, kept coming and going, in and out with a stealthy pace, bringing in first one article of the wedding-dress and then another, and carefully arranging them in order at the other end of the room. Eleanor lay there and watched what was going on, as the wretched Mary Stuart might have watched the preparations for her toilet on the morning of her execution. Everything set carefully out that she was to wear, and all the little minute and trifling arrangements for her adorning upon that day which was to be her last on earth.

Perhaps it was a presentiment—a prevailing feeling that this day would also be her last—that her heart was breaking—would break before the day was over,—

that gave a something of the same sad and solemn tranquillity to the feelings of Eleanor as she lay there, her soft blue eyes now dry and stony, but with a solemn expression of awe in them, as they turned slowly from object to object.

And now the beautiful garments of finest lace and linen are laid out in order; and lastly Cary goes out, and again, with a certain air of triumph, re-enters, bearing the wedding-gown, of finest Brussels lace and richest white satin, and lays it with a certain reverence, such as that with which we greet the supremely beautiful, upon the couch. Then again she retires, again returns, and the sweeping veil hangs over one arm, and in her hand is the beautiful coronet of orange flowers and myrtle which is to deck that loveliest one for the great sacrifice.

These arrangements, carried on in a slow and almost reverential manner, and with evidently much caution to avoid noise, are at last completed. The stable clock strikes the half-hour after seven, and Cary comes up to her young lady's bed.

The good woman started back as she

cast her eyes upon the face, so ashy pale, which rested upon the pillow.

"Bless my stars! dear Miss Wharncliffe! What *is* the matter with you? How dreadful ill you *do* look!"

For all answer Eleanor stretched out her cold, trembling hand, took the warm, sturdy one of the good Cary, and laid it against her heart.

"My goodness! What's the matter? What *is* the matter?"

"It's breaking—that's all."

"Breaking! breaking! What's all this talk about? Miss Eleanor! Miss Wharncliffe! and this your wedding-day! What can you be thinking on? What can you be raving on?—And Mr. Randal, that you used to be so fond of, and he so fond of you! Well, wedding-days, they say, are nervous days to most young ladies; but then only think what most of 'em have to leave! Homes, and sisters, and brothers, and friends, and father, and mother! and go nobody knows where, and often with nobody knows whom, or something very much like it. But you, dear Miss Eleanor, only think how much less awesome a thing

it is for you; why it's quite free and easy like, to your own cousin, you know. You haven't even to leave the family—And one you've known from a baby; and who, I verily believe—though he mayn't be of a very loving nature to all the world—loves *you* as the apple of his eye."

She sighed, and the countenance softened a little from its look of distraction and horror at this. There was but one thought which could afford the slightest alleviation to her lacerated feelings, and that was the thought that Randal loved her, and that she could make *him* happy at least.

But then there was another—a dearer, a far dearer, who must be, who would be, who *was* most miserable. And, oh! the yearnings of her poor, longing heart after him!

"But come, come, Miss Eleanor," continued the old servant, "time flies apace. Please to be getting up. There's your hair to be done you know, and that in itself will take me three-quarters of an hour."

"Get up—get up"—answered she mechanically—"and what?—what for?—what——?"

"Why to be married, sure and certain," said Cary, half laughing. "Get up to be sure you must, Miss Eleanor, and lose no time."

She attempted no resistance; she got up. For a little while she seemed perfectly passive and patient under the hands of Cary, and suffered herself to be dressed like a victim adorning for, but ignorant of, the coming sacrifice. But when, after having completed the plaiting and arrangements of the most beautiful hair in the world, her maid was proceeding to place the orange-flower coronet upon her head, a sudden rush of recollections seemed to come over her; she uttered a fearful cry, tore the flowers from her, and cast them desperately upon the floor.

"What am I about?—What are *you* about?—What are we doing?"—she screamed wildly.

"Doing—doing, Miss Eleanor! Compose yourself my dear, dear young lady, for goodness' sake."

"How very strange she is!" thought Cary, "I never imagined her poor nerves could give way in this manner. Here,

my dear Miss Eleanor, do please take a few of your drops. Don't give way in this sort. Really, do recollect yourself, please."

She laid hold of Cary's arm, grasping it with such force, that she left the mark of her small fingers upon the flesh, and looking at her with an almost fierce expression glaring in her eyes, saying—"Tell me—tell me—I don't know; I don't understand—Oh!—oh! Marcus—Marcus!"

The fatal name at last burst forth, wild screams succeeded, and she fell in violent hysterics upon the ground. Her shrieks were heard in Lady Wharncliffe's room; the terrified mother came rushing in.

"What *is* the matter? What are you about, Cary?"

"Oh, madam!—Oh, Lady Wharncliffe! she's very, very bad, I am sure."

"Child! child! Eleanor!—Some æther, Cary; some sal volatile! Child! dear Eleanor!—and all her beautiful hair too—It's well you had not put the veil and flowers on.—Dear, dear girl! take this."

And Lady Wharncliffe, holding the glass to her daughter's lips, at the same moment endeavoured to save the beautiful plaits of

hair from being altogether dishevelled and disarranged upon the ground.

The paroxysm began to subside. Heavings of the breast and heavy sighs succeeded to convulsions. Eleanor opened her eyes, and endeavoured to smile faintly, to reassure her mother, who did, indeed, look, for her, most unusually distressed and annoyed.

"You are better, my love. Lay her upon the bed, Cary; I doubt you'll have all the hair to do over again," whispered Lady Wharncliffe, now much relieved, and able, as is the case with most of us, to return to petty troubles, when the greater ones have passed away.

"Oh! we'll manage that," answered Cary; "only let Miss Wharncliffe be still after her drops for a bit."

"Yes, lie down, there's my darling."

And Eleanor, completely exhausted by the paroxysm, and literally feeling more dead than alive, suffered herself to be laid by the mother and the attendant upon the bed. She closed her eyes, and sank into a state of almost complete moral, though no longer physical insensibility.

"I had better go on with my dressing here," whispered Lady Wharncliffe; "Tell Standish to give you my things, and I will be putting them on. You can do that for me; for I would rather Standish did not come in. Tell her I shall not want her now, and that I will come and have my hair finished and my bonnet put on in my own room when Miss Eleanor is better."

Cary left the room.

Then Lady Wharncliffe approached her daughter's bed. There she lay, livid as death, one pale white hand and arm extended upon the bed-clothes, the other arm, upon which her head rested, with the hand clenched, thrust despairingly forward. Never had she looked more surpassingly lovely. But never had even her features expressed such deep sadness.

"It is very tiresome—very provoking," thought her mother, in much perplexity; "but there is nothing for it now but to carry the matter through. Her nerves are sadly disordered. Nothing, it is plain, will restore them but quiet; and how can such a sensitive creature have anything

like quiet till a marriage is over? Besides, everybody will be coming—the breakfast ready—all this expense—and Sir John,—and then the Langfords—they will be offended, ten to one; and once offend a Langford and good-bye to you—And Randal, too! The silly, poor fellow, seemed to suffer horribly last night, and not to look half satisfied. He'll be off for good if one don't take care, and then what will Sir John and Everard say? Besides, such an eligible match as it is for her, and so suitable to everybody in every way,—no, no,—there is nothing else to be done now but to have a little resolution and force the matter through." She took out her watch.

"A quarter-past eight, if I don't declare. Well, she cannot be expected to appear till half-past nine, and then only just to pass to her father's carriage—Randal need not see her till that moment—A look will be all—and really, as for her hair, it does not look so very bad—the plaits can be smoothed a little, and the flowers will cover a good deal, and we can throw the veil a little forward. Oh, Cary's

a clever creature! She will settle all that in ten minutes.—How lucky, poor child, she had not got her dress on.—What could we have done then? It is a lovely dress, it must be confessed, only that lower flounce is out of proportion, to my taste.—Are you better, my love?" as Eleanor sighed, gently altering the position of her arms, and opening her eyes,—

"Yes—no—something . . . . . ."

"What, love? What, my dear?"

"Something here," pressing her hand languidly against her chest.

"Yes, my dear, let me feel your pulse. Oh, dear love, what a worry it is in! A few more of your sedative drops, Eleanor?"

"If you please."

The saccharine drops were given, and again the languid eyes closed. She seemed incapable alike of thought or feeling.

Cary at last re-entered, and Lady Wharncliffe, leaving her daughter to rest under the influence of the sedative she had administered, applied herself to the finishing of her own toilette, which, by the assistance of Cary, and in spite of that

habitual attention to the minutest details on such matters so characteristic of Lady Wharncliffe, was in a short time completed. Whilst this was going on, a whispered conversation was kept up between the lady and the attendant.

"I think we may let her lie till a quarter to nine, Cary. You can scuttle up her hair some way. It does not look so very bad even as it is—and there's nothing but the dress and the veil to be put on."

"There, that will do," as Cary inserted the last pin; and Lady Wharncliffe having surveyed herself in the long glass, arranged the fall of a lace or a ribbon, and settled everything at last to her satisfaction, added, "I will just step down and see how things are going on. You stay here, and for dear life don't utter a word, or make the least noise to disturb her till it is absolutely necessary. She seems to have fallen asleep. We may let her lay till nine. If she *is* ten minutes behind the time it surely does not signify."

And she left the room.

In the hall, at the foot of the stairs, the first person she met was Randal Langford.

He looked dark, gloomy, out of humour, restless, and uneasy; but she went up to him with as cheerful an air as she could command.

"Is Eleanor dressed?" he asked, "I should like to see her before we go to church—not being allowed to speak to her last night."

"Unreasonable creature! Not allowed? Why she was fast asleep."

"Let me speak to her now, then—She is awake now, at least, I suppose."

"Unreasonable creature! Was there ever such a request made? Awake she is, certainly, but not dressed yet. Young ladies will be dawdling upon these occasions—Think of it as you will, the marriage ceremony is a very nervous business to them—and Eleanor, you know, is the most nervous of the nervous."

"I am sorry you will not let me see her. I want to see her—I want to have five minutes' conversation with her.—There is something painful, something that goes against my feelings," he went on, hurriedly and irritably, "in meeting her in the church for the first time after a four weeks'

absence; I beg I may be allowed to see her now, and alone."

"Well, well, this is the most unreasonable, the most unheard-of request that ever was made by a bridegroom upon the wedding morning. Don't you know that, by all precedent, she belongs exclusively to me for these few remaining hours at least—You are quite infringing upon my known privileges—but as you were so unluckily disappointed last night, I will waive my prescriptive claims in your favour. Allow me only to pass you for a moment. I must just step down to the housekeeper's room to give a few last directions; but I will come back as soon as possible—and then I will go up and hurry on this dear child, and you shall see her immediately."

And Lady Wharncliffe passed him quickly, and made her way towards the housekeeper's room, where she took care to be detained till a quarter-past nine, whilst Randal paced the hall, anxious and out of humour, wondering she did not return, and most impatiently consulting his watch, and looking at the door by which she had disappeared. He was more and more

dissatisfied, and yet he could not have easily defined why; but his temper was, we know, jealous and gloomy, and easily excited to unpleasant suspicions of a perfectly undefined character, as in the present instance they were,—not the less painful though because they took no tangible shape, and could not be seized upon for dissection and examination.

The events of the preceding evening had given new force to the ill-defined feelings of discontent which had haunted his courtship. The forlorn expression of Eleanor's face, as he had watched her lying upon her pillow looking so sad, in spite of her loveliness, and still more the something of embarrassment which he had detected in Lady Wharncliffe's manner, had haunted him all night. He was at a loss what course to adopt, time hurried him on so fast. The irrevocable moment was approaching so rapidly — the irrevocable moment, which once passed, could never be recalled—What was to be done?

Anything!—Nothing!—Was the wedding hour, that hour to which he had so long looked forward as one of ineffable

bliss—that most sacred moment of his life, when he was to place the holy ring upon Eleanor's finger, to be thus clouded over with distrust and doubt, and become a moment of ineffable misery. No, that at least, it should not be. Come what would of it, he would see Eleanor first. He would see her, and speak to her, exchange a few words alone, and set all right.

It does not appear that he anticipated anything more. In spite of his misgivings, it would seem that he had nothing in him which in the least approached to a suspicion of the real state of the case, he had all along doubted whether Eleanor really loved him, as he so passionately desired to be loved. He had all along distrusted his power to make her so exquisitely happy as he longed to make her—as his pride, as well as his love demanded that he should be able to make her. Such feelings were the sole grounds of his present discontent. He seems to have expected, that if allowed to see her alone for a few moments, it would again have happened, as it had so

often happened before, that her sweetness —the sort of loving gentleness that there was about her, when touched by the deep fervour of his attachment, would have re-assured him, dissipated these harassing doubts, and restored him once more to himself and to her.

In this persuasion he had left his bed at six o'clock, had dressed and descended the stairs which led from his side of the house to the hall—for be it observed, that at Lidcote Hall, as at many old halls built in the form of a hollow square, the chambers occupied by the family and those set apart for the guests, opened into opposite galleries, and were reached by a different flight of stairs. These two galleries being, it may be remarked in passing, united at the opposite end of the nave by a very handsome gallery, or rather saloon, of considerable breadth, but much more considerable length, which formed, indeed, a very fine chamber.

Randal had felt assured that Lady Wharncliffe would be down early, and he had resolved to be beforehand with her and prefer his request in time, being,

indeed, prepared to give his prayer the form of a demand, should he meet with any opposition upon her part. The family was early up and stirring, and there was a great hurry and bustle to be overheard as he walked pensively up and down the hall, listening for the well-known foot-steps of Lady Wharncliffe; but all this passing and hurrying to and fro seemed a matter of course upon such an occasion. Suddenly he thought he heard a faint shriek, and doors hastily open and shut up-stairs. He listened anxiously, he thought he recognised the voice again! But at that moment the double-door at the head of the stairs, which closed the gallery that way, to shut out the noise from the hall, and which had stood a little open, was suddenly closed and he could hear no more.

He thought the hours never would run off, and that Lady Wharncliffe never would appear. It was nearly nine, when at last she came. Not unprepared to find him there, for she supposed that, like the rest of the young men, he would be dressed and waiting about ir the hall

or the drawing-room, but a good deal annoyed to see him planted at the foot of the stairs—looking up as if watching for something, and with a very gloomy expression of face. The cloud had, indeed, been darkening, and darkening every quarter of an hour that he had waited expecting her. She could get to Eleanor's room through the servants' apartments another way; and she was resolved that happen what might, the affianced ones should not meet until Eleanor came down to pass to her father's carriage. She thought the only thing to be done would be to return up-stairs without repassing him, and quite to forget her promise in the natural hurry incident to the occasion, leaving her excuses to be accepted or not as the case might be; and feeling very indifferent as to whether she gave satisfaction or dissatisfaction to her son-in-law, so that he were once irrevocably her son-in-law.

At nine o'clock, therefore, she entered her daughter's room; whilst Randal, feeling every moment more distressed and irritable, vainly endeavoured to be-

guile his impatience by pacing up and down the hall, pausing from time to time to cast a look up the stairs, or at the door by which Lady Wharncliffe had vanished. Then he would place himself before the tall, narrow, arched windows of the hall, and watch the sleet and rain driving against the small panes, or listen to the swell of the winds, which, at intervals, shook the casements as if they would burst them through, and groaned and whistled around the house or among the trees.

It was, indeed, a dreadful morning.

The hall-clock told the quarter-past nine, and then Sir John Wharncliffe, accompanied by Everard, and the other young men, sallied forth from a small breakfast-room, where they had been taking chocolate over a blazing fire, and began to look for their hats, great-coats, and gloves; for the carriages were by this time prepared to come round.

There they found Randal.

"Heyday!" cried Sir John; "You here! my good fellow. It is dreadfully cold. There is chocolate in the little

breakfast-room, and a roaring fire. Do come in and take something before starting. You have a good four miles to go, and over a rough north country road."

"No, thank you, Sir John; I am waiting to see Lady Wharncliffe. Everard," taking him aside, "listen to me. I *must* see your sister."

"Well," answered Everard, affecting to laugh, and glancing at the clock; "then just have patience for fourteen minutes longer, and I take it the carriages will be at the door, and down the lovely bride will come."

"But you do not or will not understand me, Everard. Every one seems in a league, I think, wilfully to misunderstand me this morning. I want—I wish—I must—and I will—speak to Eleanor for a few minutes alone,—before she comes down to enter your father's carriage."

He spoke earnestly, angrily, passionately. Everard cast a hasty, alarmed, scrutinizing, glance at him. The glance did not escape Randal. But the other recollected himself, and, with a laugh

which he intended to sound careless, turned away, saying,—

"You must be clever if you get it. Women, the deuce take them, can think of nothing but their dress on a wedding morning. I'll be bound they are all too busy with her toilette to remember you. But,—" observing the increasing gloom of Randal's face,—he added, "but, if you really do wish it, I'll run up-stairs to my mother, and see what can be done."

And lightly he ascended the stairs. The red door closed after him. He did not return any more than his mother had done.

Randal remained standing at the foot of the stairs, his eyes riveted upon the red door. He could scarcely contain his rage and impatience.

And now the carriages are heard coming round. Sir John Wharncliffe's draws up to the door; whilst the sleet and rain beat pitilessly against the windows, and the wind roars and howls furiously.

Mrs. Langford, who had been sitting quietly over the fire in her own dressing-

room, now entered the hall, accompanied by two or three young ladies who were to officiate as bridesmaids. They had arrived early that morning, and had been taken up-stairs to breakfast and warm themselves.

The hall began rapidly to fill with the wedding-guests and their attendants. Servants were seen hurrying up and down, preparing people for the departure; helping the gentlemen to their cloaks and great-coats, and holding shawls and cloaks, whilst the young men attended upon the young ladies.

There was much laughing, chattering, and bustle going on; whilst the wind without burst out at intervals into the most furious blasts,—howling and shrieking; and the rain and sleet drove more violently than ever against the clattering windows. Surely such a day of tempest had scarcely ever been known in the country!

"What weather! what the deuce shall we do? We shall all be blown over. How horrid cold!" &c., &c., &c.;—and small feet kept stamping in pretty impa-

tience upon the marble floor of the apartment, and there was great calling for boas and mantles, with,—"Oh, wrap me up well, for goodness' sake!" and,—"Do give me my victorine!" and,—"Quite a shame to muffle yourself up so!"—and so on. And, in the midst of this confusion of cheerful voices, and pretty affectations, and all the lively hurry incident to the occasion, there that tall dark figure stood —his eyes riveted upon the red door, and suffering from an agony of mingled vexation, anger, distrust, and impatience impossible to describe.

Nobody noticed him. It seemed natural enough that he should stand watching there;—and his countenance was turned away,—so that no one observed the almost livid paleness that gradually overspread the harsh and dark face. Even had they, few, I believe, would have cared to interpose by any troublesome observations; he was a man people in general were not very fond of meddling with.

At last, Sir John Wharncliffe himself began to grow impatient as he saw his

fine horses standing waiting at the door, exposed to all the fury of the wind, rain and sleet,—and began to swear a little, and to exclaim in no measured terms against women for their endless delays,—and at last ordered one of the female servants, in attendance, to go up-stairs and inquire when Lady Wharncliffe would be ready.

She obeyed and passed through that red door, which, as it stood there so obstinately closed, as it were, against him alone, seemed, at last, to fret Randal beyond bearing. Feeling desperate, and resolved to force an explanation at any risk, he set his foot upon the stairs, and was beginning impetuously to ascend,—when the hated obstacle was suddenly thrown aside,—the door flew wide open,—and, at the head of the stairs, as about to descend, the bride at last appeared; she was leaning upon her brother's arm, and supported, as it were, behind, by her mother.

Her white dress floated round her,—the beautiful hair was half-hidden, half displayed by the light folds of the rich

Brussels veil. Her fair forehead was surmounted by the pale greens and the white blossoms of her bridal coronet;—and beneath them appeared a face far paler than all these. The cheek was colourless, bloodless, ghastly,—wan, greenish shades were around her lips and beneath her eyes, which were wide open, and seemed to gaze into vacancy with a dreamy unmeaning stare.

She moved forward as if impelled by others only, and by no will of her own; —in a strange, spectral, silent manner.

He was inexpressibly shocked. It was with a feeling approaching almost to horror that he stood there for a moment gazing upon the altered face of her he so passionately loved; — then, no longer master of himself, he was rushing vehemently forward to address her,—even now, — but Everard waved him imperiously back,—saying, in an angry tone,—

"Are you resolved to drive my father mad? For Heaven's sake get along, Eleanor,—do you hear how it rains? you will be drowned before you get into the carriage."

And he passed, with her, hastily on,—and even whilst he was speaking, the hall-door was opened, and such a whirlwind of rain and storm burst in that everything was thrown into the most unutterable confusion. And in the midst of this, scarcely sensible of what was going on, he saw that pale spectre hurried forward, followed by Lady Wharncliffe, — who saluted him with a nod and a smile as she passed.— The first sound which awakened him from the sort of trance into which he fell was the loud banging to of the carriage-door,—the cry of "All right!" by the two footmen, as they sprang up behind,—and the rolling away of Sir John Wharncliffe's carriage

What followed was all confusion,—the wind roared through the door, and hissed against the casements; the rain poured down in torrents with deafening violence. People laughed, and cried out; and the young ones enjoyed the hurry and disorder to the utmost;—but he heard nothing,—for the roar of many waters was in his ears, —and he stood there like one bewildered.

He started, and was awakened; for now

his grave and formal mother came up to him in her coldest and most composed manner,—and, as if this morning were the most ordinary morning in his life, addressed him with,—

"You go with me, Randal; and Miss Montague and Mr. Wharncliffe are of our party. Come, if you please; the carriage is at the door I believe, and we must not keep anybody waiting this horrid day," &c.

And his servant came up with his hat and gloves, which he took mechanically, and followed passively into the carriage, whilst the winds lifted their loud voices, and whistled, and roared, as if in wild and gloomy mockery; the huge trees bent and bowed their huge branches to the earth, as if in a bitter irony of congratulation; the vanes upon the roofs shrieked and cried, and all nature seemed rushing together in wildest uproar, like that which was raging in his own breast.

Miss Montague took her seat.

"What are we waiting for, Mr. Wharncliffe? Oh, Mr. Wharncliffe! Where is Mr. Wharncliffe?"

He was nowhere to be found: there was a general hue and cry for him; at length somebody recollected that they had seen him leap into Sir John Wharncliffe's carriage, immediately after his mother. So the door of Mrs. Langford's carriage was shut, and it drove away.

Not one word did Randal utter as they went along. Wrapped up in his cloak, which he had drawn closely round him, and held so as entirely to conceal almost the whole of his face, he remained obstinately silent, in spite of all Miss Montague's attempts to draw him into conversation. At length, seeing him so determined not to make himself agreeable, the young lady, voting him for the hundredth time in her life the rudest and most odious creature she had ever met with, turned away to amuse herself with something else. Certainly it was not with Mrs. Langford.

She was a merry, cheerful-tempered girl herself, and certainly, as she hung her arm through the side-straps of the carriage, swinging easily up and down, eyeing now the dark and moody bride-

groom, and now the stiff and stately mother,—though Ravenscliffe, by all accounts, was a very fine place, and the Langfords one of the most opulent and important families in the county,—she did not feel in the least inclined to envy the bride. No, she hugged herself in her freedom, and thought, with more than usual complacency, of a certain fair-haired, bright-eyed, lively young fellow in a cavalry regiment, whose acquaintance she had made some not very long time before.

Mrs. Langford preserved her air of cold and stately dignity, occupied with her own slow thoughts, quite unobservant of the condition of her son; who, perfectly stupified with excess of his misery, maintained his position unmoved, during the long, long way it was to the church where the marriage was to take place.

CHAPTER IV.

> " Darker and darker the black shadows fall,
> No voice in the chambers, no sound in the hall."

IT was a small, darksome, little tumble-down church, at which the ceremony was to be performed; the walls overgrown with ivy, which hung in heavy wreaths over the old windows of yellowish, greenish glass, and so small-paned as almost to exclude the light when light there was to be had; but the day was so obscured by the raging storm, which still continued to beat, that it was literally through a dim twilight that the company made their way to the altar.

The party in the first carriage were already standing there, when Randal entered the church. He hastened up, his face flushed, his brow dark, his gestures impatient but determined even yet—he felt resolved to demand some explanation before the irrevocable vow was made. But what can man do? What can the strongest and most determined will effect against the force of some circumstances—trivial yet invincible? What could Randal do,—defiant and daring as his spirit was, and holding in such rude contempt the conventional prejudices of other men,—what could even he do now, when there stood his affianced bride actually waiting for him at the altar, surrounded by all this expectant company of friends and relations upon both sides? What could he do but accept the hand thus almost forced, as it were, into his?

She stood there, leaning against Everard, who had one arm round her waist; her head rested against his shoulder—not willingly but of necessity, for she could not hold it up; and while thus she lay, he kept unceasingly muttering something

in an under tone to her. Her eyes were cast up to his face with a vague, imploring expression which he appeared not to see—or seeing, would not answer; but signing to the company to arrange themselves, he cast a significant look at Randal. The look was half-defying, half-re-assuring. It seemed to say, "Nothing in the world but nervousness. She will be well when it is over;"—and it seemed to say, "Hesitate if you dare."

That look would have aroused Randal, if anything could, to have flung back the hand of his betrothed, like Claudio, in "Much Ado about Nothing," even before the altar. But we are slaves of proprieties. We are greater slaves than the victims, in ruder days, of brute force and arbitrary power. There are things done at this time of day, without the slightest apparent coercion, which are impossible to be avoided by a man in his senses; and Everard and Lady Wharncliffe well knew, that get them two once without explanation to the altar, and the day was their own. Even a man of Randal Langford's resolution would find it impossible to hesitate

or talk of explanation there. And so it proved.

Surrounded as he was,—impelled forward as he was,—what could he do but take the hand of the half-dying creature who kneeled by his side, faintly uttering, or rather appearing to utter, her vows, and place the ring upon her cold, lifeless finger, and wed himself—for so it seemed to him—with a shroud?

What he endured at that moment the attempt seems vain to describe. Such a tumultuous confusion of opposing feelings; such deep, deep, sincere, devoted love; such intense admiration, even then, of that beautiful, beautiful, but sad, despairing face—that spectral image of woe beside him; such agonies of wounded pride and tenderness,—of jealousy, rage, suspicion, all at arms within; such burning indignation at the manner in which all this had come about,—distrust, withering distrust of all, of every one, even of her! Caught, foiled, betrayed, cheated,—he, the strong, invincible man, by them all! By her parents, and by his own. And then again he glanced at the pale victim

by his side, and gushes of tears—tears as of blood—sprung involuntarily to his eyes.

The agitation in which the service on both sides was performed,—trembling, broken voices, shivering, shuddering limbs, faces ghastly, eyes all darkened with despair,—oh! was it not a fearful thing to behold?

Got through, however, it at last was; and Eleanor Wharncliffe was given away by her father to this man, changed—or rather, I should say, restored, by the events of the last few fatal hours, to the dark, wayward moodiness of his worser self. He stood there, dark as the storm that was raging outside.

The little, low-roofed church was a gloomy place enough, but that was nothing to the gloom which gradually pervaded the whole party. Every bystander seemed to feel that some dire tragedy was about to be enacted; it was not long in coming.

Eleanor had breathed hard and painfully throughout the whole of the service, like one the action of whose heart was rapidly failing. Her eyes looked dim, and

her expression vacant and wandering. She was trembling, as I have said, in every limb; shaking, as in an ague-fit, she was; but still she kept going on, and repeating, as it were, mechanically, her part of the service. He at last seemed infected with her disorder, and began to shake too.

At last they sank down upon their knees side by side, to receive the blessing which concludes the service. Both trembled terribly; both heads were dropped upon their breasts. It was over; he raised his, and looked up. But her head was not raised; it kept sinking lower and lower, lower and lower, — till she slid downwards off the steps of the altar, and fell lifeless upon her face before it. Then Randal uttered a loud and terrible cry, and a blasting imprecation burst from his lips as he turned fiercely to Everard, and demanded passionately what he was to think of this?

"Think of it?" answered Everard, coolly, "why, that she is a poor nervous creature, and is in a fainting fit. Young ladies," he went angrily on, — for all the girls were crowding round her,—

"please to let her alone;—and you, clerk, open the door and let us have a little fresh air! Will you only be quiet—only let her alone!—She'll come round if you'll let her alone. Mother! for heaven's sake don't look so frightened."

But Randal in an agony of distress—of grief for her—of anguish for himself—grief and anguish exasperated almost to madness by all those fiercer passions of rage and indignation against others to which he was so fatally prone—threw himself upon his knees beside the motionless body of her he loved so distractedly, and caught and raised her in his arms.

"Keep her head down! Don't raise her head! For God's sake keep the body in a recumbent attitude!" cried a young man, rushing forwards.

He was a stranger,—the assistant to a neighbouring surgeon who chanced to be among the spectators of the ceremony assembled to witness it from the pews.

"For God's sake do not lift up her head, Mr. Langford! She may die instantly if you do."

"Die! Is she not dead?"

"Oh no, sir! only fainted. But the heart has almost ceased to beat. There, lift her gently in your arms, keep the head level with the body,—do not move her more than necessary. So, so!—turn the face to the fresh air. Pray keep off the crowd, Mr. Wharncliffe; let her have air. Fetch sal volatile, for the love of heaven! Run, for dear life, to Mr. Austin. Beg him to come instantly, and bring æther and sal volatile. Run! run! She is going! she is going!"

Thus the active and energetic young student kept crying out, whilst Langford with his own face all shadowed and darkened over as if with the hues of death itself, sat upon the steps of the altar holding the lovely lifeless form of her he adored in his arms. He felt a sort of desperate comfort in having her there, close pressed to that heart of his, now almost dying within him at the piteous sight.

The distress of Lady Wharncliffe,—the mingled embarrassment, vexation, and alarm of Sir John,—the surprise, terror, and pity of the other assistants,—it is

needless to describe. The countenances of Mr. and Mrs. Langford alone displayed a something different from all this. They looked coldly astonished and perplexed. They belonged to that class of characters in whom, in cases of doubt like this, the unkinder and harsher were sure to prevail over the more indulgent feelings. Of those, who in any unlooked-for disaster are more prone to search out for a cause to blame, than a sufferer to pity. They felt more angry than pitying now. This sort of public scene, the scandal, the exposure, the evident reluctance upon the part of the bride, the suspicious behaviour of her friends, incensed as much as it perplexed them. And to be perplexed was in itself a cause of irritation.

But their gloomy looks of discontent were not regarded; all attention was turned to Randal. His face was still bent down over her, intently watching for some sign of returning life. His anger had given way to an agonising despair as he held her there clasped to his bosom, vainly struggling to detain the being which he felt about to be torn from him. His eyes

bent upon her with an expression never seen in those eyes before, earnestly—earnestly—gazing — gazing — seeking for some sign of returning life.

It came at last. The fresh air blowing into the little church at length breathed upon her face; first the soft ringlets of her hair began to move and stir in the wind as if the life were returning into them, and then a faint flush coloured her cheek—her eyes languidly opened. She raised them and met his. But no sooner had they done so than she uttered a faint but wildering cry, and went off in fainting fit after fainting fit.

At length Mr. Austin arrived with his restoratives, and succeeded in bringing her again to herself; but she was by this time so excessively languid and ill, that it was difficult to decide what was next to be done. To proceed upon the wedding journey, as they were to have done, was manifestly impossible; even to return to Lidcote Hall seemed hazardous. Mr. Austin proposed to carry the young lady to his own house, and there to wait till she was somewhat better; but this plan no one would hear of.

Sir John, Lady Wharncliffe, Everard, were alike impatient to get her home, and hush up the story as far as was possible. As for Randal, still holding her in his arms and clasping her convulsively when any one ventured to approach, as if with design to remove her, he uttered not a syllable good or bad. Indeed, he was in a state to forbid anything like consultation, and felt only impelled by a strong instinctive wish to get her and himself away from this oppressive crowd and most distressing exhibition of their mutual misery. He cared not how, and whither, so he might have her to himself, to weep over her alone. Yes, weep,—for tears,—unwonted guests! were fast rising to his eyes.

After some whispering conference together, it was agreed between Lady Wharncliffe and Mr. Austin, that Eleanor should be laid in one of the double carriages, and accompanied by her mother and Mr. Austin, should be carried back to Lidcote Hall, there to remain till she was sufficiently recovered to proceed upon her wedding journey.

So Lady Wharncliffe came up to Randal,

—whom no one, till then, had dared to address,—and said: "My dear Randal, this is what good Mr. Austin advises; listen, will you?"

He lifted up his head and listened, whilst she proceeded to say:

"It is evidently impossible that dear Eleanor should begin her journey till she is a little recovered from this attack. Mr. Austin thinks it, however, possible, if we lay her flat in one of the double carriages, that we may manage to get her safely home, and he will accompany me, to give directions, and apply the necessary assistance upon the way. When the business is got through at the vestry, if you will throw yourself into your own carriage, you can speedily follow us."

"Follow you!" he said; "I am not going to leave her;"—and with that he strained her more closely to his heart.

"But be reasonable, dear Randal; you must go into the vestry;—and as for attending her home, only two can go in the same carriage, and it is obvious that those two must be her medical man and her mother."

"I shall not leave her. Settle it as you like."

"But what is to be done? Do be reasonable."

"I shall carry her home in these arms. You and the doctor may arrange the rest as you please."

And he turned away, and again he bent his head over her, pressing once more the almost lifeless form to his bosom.

There was no help for it. He was not to be persuaded. So it was at last agreed, between Sir John and the clerk, that the marriage register should be carried up to Lidcote Hall, for the bride and bridegroom to sign together. And now the carriage drew up, and Randal, lifting his Eleanor in his arms, bearing her as a tender nurse would a little helpless child, got her into the carriage, and placed himself there, with her still lying in his arms. The mother and the medical man entered after him, and the carriage drove away. The broken, and dismayed, and terrified wedding party following without order, when and how they could.

It was a melancholy sight enough when they arrived at Lidcote Hall. The large and splendid party, which it was intended should take part in the bridal festivities, scattered—and those still assembled, consisting only of such few as were lodging in the house. The numerous party of friends and acquaintance who had joined at the church, receiving no intimation from any of the family that their presence at the breakfast to which they had been invited would be now desirable, had thought it best to return at once home. They did so, saddened and awe-struck at this fatal and inexplicable conclusion of what ought to have been so gay and joyful a ceremony. The few who returned to Lidcote, consisting of one or two young ladies, the two young men, and Mr. and Mrs. Langford, entered the house together.

They came in through the large hall, or rather saloon, which, upon state occasions, was used as an entertaining room, and there, set out with more than the usual brilliant abundance of such feasts, the magnificent wedding breakfast

stood prepared, awaiting the numerous expected guests.

It looked such a mockery. Everybody turned with a sick feeling away, and entered the drawing-room. In the drawing-room were a few more friends who had already arrived, being invited to be present at the breakfast, though not to go to church. They were all gaily dressed, but looking pale and shocked, and in embarrassment what to do.

For the bride had arrived a few minutes before, and in a state of indescribable suffering from the failing action of her poor, half-broken heart,—which had been much increased by the motion of the carriage—had been carried by Randal, by this time almost as pale as herself,—trembling so that he scarcely could hold her,—yet fiercely repelling every offer of assistance,—into her own room. And here one of those dire struggles between life and death succeeded, which it breaks the heart to witness, and which continued for hours to agonise and convulse this tender frame before the eyes of her disheartened lover. He, totally unused to such scenes,

—unaccustomed to the spectacle of human suffering in any of its forms—more especially in such a one as this, when the struggle between life and death seemed tearing the delicate frame to pieces—stood there motionless at the foot of the bed upon which had lain her, offering no assistance; but angrily, though silently, resisting every attempt to move him away. There he stood, aghast, but immovable, watching paroxysm after paroxysm of this wild tempest of nervous action, with a horror and distress beyond description, and never to be forgotten—leaving on the mind one of those ineffaceable impressions to which we can never afterwards recur without a shudder. His heart was torn with her sufferings; but, alas! he was a Langford—and, as it had been with his parents, so it was to be with him. The intensity of grief and disappointment was aggravated by a deep and gloomy sense of injury: and a proud resentment was mingled with, and embittered every tender feeling. With them it had overpowered all others—with him, these evil passions only served to destroy

the sweetness, however melancholy, which a love so pure and sincere as his ought to have shed over the darkest hour.

The wedding feast below! the chamber of death-agony above! Each in its degree equally gloomy! Everard and his father had returned together in the last carriage; their conversation had been most uncomfortable and unsatisfactory. They both felt excessively annoyed at what had taken place. Vexed beyond measure at being involved in such a scene, which they both agreed in entirely attributing to Eleanor's weakness and want of self-command; waiving, by tacit consent, any share their proceedings might have had in causing it. Compassion for her seemed the last feeling to enter into the heart of either father or son, though they concurred in pitying each other's mortification extremely,—not forgetting Lady Wharncliffe,—for having been subjected to such an annoyance. They were even candid enough to confess how exceedingly awkward and disagreeable all this must have been for Randal Langford, and to acknowledge that if Mr. and Mrs. Langford looked offended, it

was scarcely more than could have been expected—In short, that it was a most awkward business altogether. They did not express, however, openly what each confessed to himself secretly,—that, awkward or not, they were heartily glad the marriage was carried through—was got, well or ill, over—and the knot securely tied.

The company in the drawing-room, when Sir John and Everard entered it, looked, except as far as the gaiety of their dress was concerned, more like a party assembled for a funeral than for a wedding. People were sitting and standing about, speaking little, and when they did so, in low whispering voices; whilst, at the upper end of the room, as a sort of centre-piece, or leading figure of the picture, sat Mrs. Langford, drawn up to the full height, all solemn and dignified displeasure. Mr. Langford, his back to the fire, stood at no great distance from her, looking seriously and gravely annoyed.

All Sir John's usual gaiety and carelessness seemed to forsake him as he entered the really awful presence—for the serious

displeasure of Mr. Langford was what no man, be he whom he might, could brave with indifference. Even the usual haughty assurance of Everard forsook him at this moment. In fact, neither father nor son knew exactly what to do or say. The consciousness that there had been a something —a concealment of circumstances—an uncandid and unhandsome attempt to blind the Langfords as to the real state of Eleanor's feelings, haunted and cowed them both. Then the whole ceremonial part of the affair was so awkward. What was next to be done? It was getting hard upon three o'clock. The breakfast stood there ready, and people must be getting hungry; yet, with the bride, the object of the feast, in the death-struggle in agonies which might every moment prove fatal,—how sit down to this splendid and luxurious table, sparkling with glass and gay with flowers, whilst grim death might at any instant be busy in the chamber above their heads? The bridegroom it was vain to summon. No persuasion could move him from the foot of that bed where he stood waiting the issue in gloomy silence. Would it not

be better to sit down at once without ceremony, feed their guests, and get them out of the house? It seemed the only thing to be done—so Sir John went up to Mrs. Langford, and said—

"This poor girl is no better, it seems, and your son positively refuses to leave her. It is getting late. What shall we do with all these people, who look so miserable, and are all as anxious to be released as we should be glad to get rid of them?—Had we not better go to breakfast? Will you be so kind as to take Lady Wharncliffe's place at the head of the table?—she cannot leave her daughter's room."

"Anything, Sir John, you think best to get through this painful day," said Mrs. Langford, coldly; "as you please—I am entirely at your disposal."

And she accepted his arm; and he, saying with as much gaiety as he could assume,—

"Gentlemen and Ladies, breakfast is waiting. You are to sit down to a wedding feast without either bride or bridegroom. It is only to imagine them

already started upon their honeymoon-journey, which I doubt not they will be able to do in a few hours—"

Marshalled the way into the hall, where the entertainment stood displayed, and to which the company sat down with little appetite as may be supposed, amid a vast majority of empty chairs, and with Mrs. Langford, grim as a death's-head, presiding at the head of the table, in place of the lovely Eleanor and the popular Lady Wharncliffe. No healths were drunk—no congratulations or good wishes exchanged. The gloom became deeper and deeper. The anxiety of the guests to be gone, and of the host to be relieved of them grew every instant more urgent; so carriages were ordered as soon as it decently could be done—and mutual was the feeling of relief with which the last farewells were exchanged, as the carriages in succession came up, and were filled and driven away.

CHAPTER V.

All by suffering worn and weary,
But beautiful as some fair angel yet.
LONGFELLOW.

EVENING drew on.

And as the shade of twilight closed over the chamber, the dreadful paroxysms that had lasted for so many hours abated, and Eleanor, her convulsions over, but exhausted and speechless, lay extended upon her bed.

She was able at last to swallow the necessary composing medicines, and presently her eyes closed and she fell asleep.

The doctor now besought everybody to

quit the room, and leave her to perfect quiet and the watching of Cary.

Lady Wharncliffe was really not sorry to be relieved, and signing to Randal to follow her, left the apartment attended by Mr. Austin,—but Randal followed not.

As soon as Lady Wharncliffe was gone, he left his position at the foot of the bed, and going up to Cary, took her by the arm, led her to the door, and saying in a low voice, "I see the bell—I shall ring when she awakens—I choose to watch her myself," put the good woman out, closed the door after her, and turning the key, at last found himself, as he had so long agonised to be—alone with Eleanor!

He had made desperate efforts to repress the violence of his emotions, and preserve something like the appearance of calmness during the last six dreadful hours; for he, like the unhappy Eleanor, fully appreciated the entire want of sympathy between his own character and that of those by whom he was surrounded. So strongly, indeed, that nothing was more abhorrent to his pride, as well as to a certain delicacy and dignity of heart which belongs

to true feeling, than to be betrayed into any outward manifestation of his distress before such witnesses.

Except in his resolute refusal to be parted from Eleanor, he had, after the first agonising moments were over, suppressed every external sign of feeling with stoical resolution; and the tears which, in spite of himself, would fall as he witnessed the dreadful sufferings of one so tender, and still, after all, so inexpressibly dear, were hastily dashed from his eyes. But now he was at last alone, the cruel restraint he had imposed upon himself was no longer necessary—he might weep—yes! Randal Langford might weep at will over the ruin before him, and over the cruel ruin of his own extreme happiness!

Not that, to do him justice, at this moment he did think much of his own ruined happiness. His heart was softened and melted, changed and regenerated from what it had been of old. The influences of the gentle creature had produced, insensibly but surely, their effect; and even now, before the sweet, pallid picture of

weakness in repose, which lay there beneath his eyes, it seemed as if all the harsher part of his feelings gradually subsided, and surrendered him to pity and to love.

Her face was wan and colourless, like that of one already dead; and the intense sufferings of body and mind which she had gone through, had left their touching lines upon her features; — her hair, once so lovely, hung in heavy masses round her face, and lay dishevelled upon the pillow around her. One white and delicate hand and arm lay extended upon the counterpane, the other hung in a disconsolate attitude downwards, by the side of the bed. This he softly lifted—took it in his—gazed upon it with inexpressible tenderness—bent his head softly down—kissed and then continued holding it.

And so there he sat. Sometimes with his eyes riveted upon the poor, unconscious face—sometimes turning away to brush away his fast-rising tears. Then, again, he would bend his head and glue his lips against the chill and pallid hand—then, again, turn away and weep.

Yes, Randal Langford wept; but they were honest tears—healing tears—blessed, heavenly tears, such as the strong shed when their hearts are subdued to love and pity; regenerating tears, under whose influence the rocky heart melts up, and a heart of flesh succeeds.

So there he sat, yielding to the soft passion of his grief, half turned away from the bed of the slumbering innocent, and thinking himself to all intents and purposes alone.

Little thought he what eyes were watching him.

Eleanor had awakened.

The first object her eyes fell upon was Randal Langford sitting by her bedside; his face dimly lighted by a night-lamp; his hand holding hers. The first impulse was to withdraw her hand—the second, to leave it there—to lie motionless and watch.

Indeed the feeble effort to withdraw her hand seemed more than she was capable of, even had she felt impelled to it, but that she no longer was; and she not unwillingly felt obliged to be passive.

But her eyes and her heart observed.

There he sat—Randal Langford—the severe and harsh, but the ever kind to her—the man she had injured so greatly by deceiving; there he sat, not stern, reproachful, and indignant, as she deserved, but—weeping; weeping as she might herself have wept—a soft, still, shower of tears; and now and then bending down his head, he pressed with his lips, and the tears fell upon, her passive hand.

Slumber, heavy slumber, weighed down her eyelids, and before he was aware that she had opened them, her eyes insensibly closed again; but never was that picture effaced from her heart. That picture of the stern and terrible Randal Langford sitting there by her bedside, weeping like a very woman for herself—whilst the warm tears fell fast upon her hand. The impression was left there for ever!

The morning of Eleanor's marriage had been to her like some fierce paroxysm of madness. In the dreadful excitement of the moment, thought succeeded to thought with almost supernatural activity; adding to the wild and almost

delirious repugnance which she felt against concluding her engagement.

As the fierce agonies of the insane are only aggravated, and rendered the more intense by, the fetters with which an ignorant terror endeavours to control them,—so the feeling that she was thus forced forwards in spite of all her efforts by her mother and her brother, that all help was denied,—all resistance vain,—though every feeling of her heart was shrieking wildly for redress and liberty,—had driven her at last into a paroxysm of violence. This had called forth so violent a resistance upon the part of her brother, that, at last, subdued and quelled and absolutely cowed by his rage, she had sunk into a state of passive, almost unconscious despair; under the influence of which, though every sentiment of her heart resisted, — every feeling of her soul clamoured for Marcus, — only Marcus! She had been dragged to the altar, and under the effect of this moral coercion had gone through the ceremony.

No longer mistress of herself, — no

longer capable of asserting the distinction between right and wrong,—she had thus been forced into the performance of that which she knew all the time to be wrong — greatly wrong — cruelly, grievously wrong. But she believed herself to be dying; and as the hand of the drowning wretch relaxes and loses hold of the hoarded treasure,—so, her senses swimming, all moral force in a state of dissolution,—she had at last yielded herself up with a certain despairing indifference to what she believed so soon would be of no moment. And as she sank down upon the steps of the altar, welcomed, as she thought, that rest in death which was to close her melancholy history.

The intervals of reanimation which had succeeded to this death faint, had but faintly recalled her to recollection. Something, however, remained impressed,—of dark eyes so full of anguish bent upon her, — something of strong arms that had clasped her to a wildly beating heart. The rest was all confusion, until that instant when she awoke after the slumber that had partially composed her,

to see him—the hated husband—weeping by her bedside.

Yes; he had been hated, detested, during the last few hours,—as a husband detested. Her heart had wildly asserted the heart's indefensible privilege. They might bind him to her, but it should be as Mezentius was bound to a dead body. Never, never, should he be anything more to her.

Such mad defiance of the laws of God and man was the result of the cruel violence to which she had been subjected. A sullen determination, as much the result of mental disorder as the paroxysms which had preceded it, had taken possession of her. It is the last refuge of the weak against the tyranny of the strong.

When she had opened her eyes, her first sensation had been one of gloomy abhorrence; but the warm and honest tears that streamed from his eyes melted not his heart only; they fell to soften hers,—to recall her to her gentler and better self, and wash away that revolt of evil feelings which heavy oppression and cruel wrong had left there.

This second sleep was heavy and long. When Eleanor awakened, the morning had already began to dawn, and behind the bare leafless trees of the fatal wood, the yellow glow of the sunrise was already to be seen. Her curtains were undrawn, and her blind was up, and as she lay there, in that state of dreamy rest which succeeds to great exhaustion of body or mind, she watched the rising of the sun, and the shining glitter of his golden light through the branches, with a feeling approaching to pleasure ; so greatly had her spirits been composed and tranquillised by the interval of unbroken rest which she had enjoyed.

She lay for some time in a half-dreamy state, and her thoughts seemed not yet entirely awakened to the reality of her situation. But gradually the recollection of the past day began to strengthen, and take a distinct form to her memory — in the way it does—after a severe affection of the head, whether arising from disease, accident, or violent emotion. First come dim shadowy recollections, indistinct and scarcely to be distinguished

from dreamy visions; but gradually they begin to strengthen, and to assume distinct outline and consistency — till we recognise them as representing realities, — the reality of what is, indeed, for ever past and gone into the land of shadows, but the consequences of which are permanent facts.

All around her was now perfectly still. No one was sitting by the bed; Randal was no longer to be seen; but the first image that distinctly recurred was that upon which her eyes had last rested,— that dreaded husband sitting and weeping over her as she lay. She cast a glance round her room; there was no one except Cary, who, perfectly wearied out by the excitement of the last day, had thrown herself upon a couch by the fire, and was now fast asleep. Eleanor felt herself, therefore, to all intents and purposes alone—and being alone, abandoned herself to that current of thought which only when we are alone can be pursued to any purpose. The image of Randal weeping was the first which arose, but it was followed by a long train of others;

figure succeeding to figure, scene to scene,—as in some fatal procession summoned up by the wand of an enchanter. The church — the wedding party — the stern and moody bridegroom as she had seen them at the time—swimming mistily before her eyes. The morning in her room—her heartless mother—her terrible brother—and then oh! came the scene in the wood, the figure of Marcus, like some transcendant apparition, bursting through the chain of circumstances in which she was involved. And as that face, that parting look recurred, her heart began again to beat rapidly and wildly, and every nerve and limb to tremble. And this was its bitter cry.

"Oh, Marcus! Marcus! dearest, most precious, most beloved! You were not then, as they would fain have persuaded me, untrue. You loved me, Marcus! and came over the far sea to save and claim your poor Eleanor before it was too late. Before it was too late! And I, in my weakness, and my terrors suffered myself to be torn away from you, and forsook you in that fatal hour—that

hour, the turning point of my life. Yes, I feel that so it was, and in the base cowardice of this heart I turned it wrong. But believe me, Marcus — believe her, who loved you only—it was done to spare a dreadful strife—between him I loved, and my own brother; oh, believe me my Marcus — that it was. Did I ever think — did I ever contemplate — that after having seen you, and found you faithful, and loving still, I could or would give myself to another? Oh, believe me! believe me! I never did. It has all passed like a hurried fearful dream—I knew not what I did—I knew not where they were hurrying me, till I found where I was and what I am.

"I am married to another—and we are parted in this world, and in the next world—alas! alas! for ever, and ever, and ever. Oh, that I could die!—oh, that I might die!—that it would please the Author of my being to take me to himself, still innocent and yours. What must I do, my Marcus?—for I am yours, not his. You shall guide me and direct

me; you alone I will obey. My heart is yours, to you my allegiance alone is due. Tell me what I shall do. Shall I fly? Whither shall I fly—oh! whither? You are not here to counsel, to protect, or save me—in this world. Shall I take refuge, then, in another? Shall I die? Die!—Oh! oh! I dare not—I dare not die. Coward still—coward ever—base heartless coward—I dare not even die! Not that life is sweet—for life is dreadful—life is hateful—life is horrid; but God is very, very fearful—and I dare not—no, I dare not rush uncalled for, into his presence. If it would please Him to summon me—to call me to Him—then how gladly, gladly would I obey the call; for the life He has given me, is a heavy curse to me.

"Gladly obey the call? Oh! is this sincere?—Is this even true?—Is this right? Are you sincere in this passionate expression of a wish to die? To leave everybody, and everything! Is it true that you are ready? Were you now actually to be summoned to appear before His judgment-seat, to give an account of your

life,—your short life!—guiltless, it is true, of any great offence; but what a life after all!—how passed!—how employed!

"And is it right, thus to desire to die? For what? A passionate regret for happiness lost, and a passionate abhorrence of duties imposed. An uncontrolled sorrow for selfish grief, and a heartless indifference to the griefs of others. For what would *he* do, think you, if his Eleanor were to be torn from him after all! Would Marcus be the happier because you were dead? And what would become of that other? Oh, that other! Nobody would be the happier but yourself, poor creature, and do you even know how it might be with you?

"Is this what you came into the world for, then? To be reared at all this expense of care and pains which your tender childhood required; and then, because you are denied the happiness for which your heart yearns—oh! *how* it yearns!—petulantly to throw up the gift of living,—every purpose of life left unattained,—every duty unperformed. And he—he who used to be so kind to you, cold and

severe as he was to every one else—he, whose heart would melt and soften at your voice, when no other voice could soften it; —he, who was as a fierce and terrible lion, yet suffered himself to be led by your hand as by that of a little child;—he who loved you when no one else loved you,—felt for you when no one else felt for you, —protected you when no one else heeded you! He, whose severe eyes, when they met yours, were—oh! so full of pity! He who, even now, after all you have thought and done, sat weeping by your bedside,—the only one of them all who had a tear to shed for your sufferings!—He, who was not jealous,—was not angry,—was not violent, as the others were;—irritable and fierce as he is by temper,—and oh! with so much cause now!—He who is,—alas! alas!—yes, is . . !—what?—what?—your husband before God and man! To whom your trembling, faltering voice but yesterday vowed honour, and obedience, and love! Yes, you did it—they made you do it, it is true; but had you not been a wretched coward, could they have made you? Had you dared to meet that hor-

rible thing, their wrath,—need you have done it? But you *have* done it. You have given yourself away. These lips pronounced the fatal words — You have given *yourself* away! And to whom? To one unworthy? No!

"Yet Marcus,—oh, horrible!—how he spoke of him! What did he say? In what terms speak of his tyranny and his pride, and his insupportable insolence, not to his equals and superiors alone, but ah! ah! to inferiors and dependents? 'I thrashed him for the University!' But what of that!—that all passed years ago. He was never insolent, haughty, or tyrannical to you. If he was harsh and unamiable to others, he loved *you*. He was always tenderness and kindness itself to you! Nay, even yesterday, when these poor eyes kept wandering round, seeking, in its terror and confusion for one kind, sympathising face among them all, where did I find it but there! He felt for me even then—I saw that he did. He pitied my distress. Oh! if they would have let him, he would have saved me; I am quite sure he would. And what are you wish-

ing and intending to do—to this one who is now your husband, and was ever your friend?—Play him false!

"And what do you purpose doing before Him, who is your Creator and your God, and before whose awful presence, yesterday, forced or not forced, constrained or not constrained, you did it!—you uttered those solemn, solemn vows! Break them! Not, it is true, by grossly outraging the laws of His commandments, it may be, those great injunctions of the all supreme—but why?—Answer me why?—Because you will not be tempted to it. But you mean to violate your duty as far as you *dare!* This is the noble, generous resolve of your heart, is it? You are too great a coward to rush into the actual commission of crime; but oh! you are not too great a coward to be a criminal in your secret heart.

"The faith of the law you will keep to your husband, because you will not be tempted. You would not have courage, even if you were tempted, to violate it. But the faith of the spirit,—the loyalty of the soul,—the singleness of the heart,—

oh, this is quite another thing. You can dare to be false in that. Nobody will find out that.—You will risk nobody's censure by that.—Society will not cry out upon you, and exclude you from its bosom—friends will not blush at you and disown you for *that.* Parents and brothers will not break forth in a storm of terrible reproaches and abandon you for ever for *that.* Oh, no, nothing of all this for *that.* You may withhold your heart, and break his — you may deny your duties, and despise his claims — you may make the man to whom you have bound yourself miserably unhappy, by yielding to your own misery and your own unhappiness—You may obstinately refuse to acknowledge the good that is in him, by obstinately persisting in contrasting it with the good that is another's. Oh! oh! that other! You may hold back your heart, resist the tendency of daily association and hourly kindness, trusting confidence, and inexhaustible love. Yes, yes, you may do all this, and pine, and look wretched and pale, and play the heroine of a woeful tale; and few will

blame you, perhaps not one. Nay, people will sympathise with and pity you. Randal will be supposed a tyrant, and every one is inclined enough to think ill of Randal. And oh! at last, Randal may end by deserving it—becoming a tyrant; and what is worst—worst, far worst of all—you may end by ruining his soul as you will have ruined his happiness!—He, who in your agonies, sat weeping by your bed!

"And will you do this thing? Or what, what will you do?

"Oh, He that died upon the Cross for me—He who died in his great love for miserable sinners, perishing but for His aid—oh, He who taught the lesson of that great, that infinite love, not to be confined to one poor mortal creature, but embracing all—oh, He that said, "Whoso will follow me, let him take up his cross daily"—May He, may He give me strength to take up my cross and obey!

"As a freewill offering I cannot do it,—for is it not laid upon me? As a freewill offering, in one sense at least, I

cannot do it, for it is imposed upon me; but as a freewill offering in one sense I can. Freely — nay, cheerfully, I can accept the cross, bear it up with a loving heart, and give myself willingly for His sake who died for me. Oh! the fetters in which I lay fast bound in misery and iron are falling from my soul. Oh! a new hope — a new strength is coming over me.

"Marcus,—farewell! farewell! Who knows but that His blessing may yet be upon us both, and unite those in holy friendship in another world the paths of whose pilgrimage are reft asunder in this. Farewell, my dearest! my beloved! my lover! Farewell! farewell! and welcome duty. Welcome patience, submission, cheerful acquiescence in the irrevocable. Welcome the tasks imposed, whatsoever they may be. And thou, my fluttering, longing heart, be silent for ever, ever more,—except to gratitude and old affection. And be thou thankful that gratitude and old affection sweeten the dreary desolation of the future.

"How many poor creatures have been

—will be—called to endure this martyrdom of love, to whom such alleviations are denied. Randal might have been hard and vulgar, insensible and unkind—and he sat weeping by my bed. He might have been rough and violent, and a terror to my poor feeble helplessness; and he has been my protector and my friend. He might have been jealous, exacting, and pitiless—but oh! that eye of pity which met mine as I lay expiring in his arms!"

Thus the course of thought went on in this young creature's head. It was not romantic, you observe.

Many will think her a marvellous common-place—some, perhaps, an unworthy—creature, thus to accept her appointed portion. Many will blame her, and justly blame her, for letting that portion be forced upon her by the unreasonable violence of others. But some will sympathise with her when the fatal deed was done, for thus endeavouring to submit, and devote herself to perform the duties she owed to the man to whom a power too strong to resist had united her.

For my part I think that she was eminently right—and that among the various duties which life in its vicissitudes imposes, there are few more important than that of an unmurmuring acquiescence in the course of things past our control, and the unceasing endeavour cheerfully to accept the alleviations, be they small or great, which every circumstance, be it the most unfortunate, presents. Let us dedicate ourselves with singleness of heart to the performance of the duties thus laid upon us. Let us give all where we profess to give all—a willing, earnest, hopeful service. Not like Ananias and Sapphira, make a hidden reserve from the dedicated offering by indulging in secret murmurings and discontent, secret dislikes and dissatisfactions.

Eleanor, once resolved to devote herself to duty and to God, was ready to give all where she gave any; and as these better thoughts and purposes came flowing in upon her heart like a flood, diffusing a peace and satisfaction till then unknown—as she offered up her innocent self at the

shrine of that conscience which was the voice of the Supreme within her, she knew well to whom her gratitude was due. She was one little tempted to assume the glory to herself, that she had thus been led to purpose justly and generously.

CHAPTER VI.

> Oh glory gone!—oh golden past!
> Such life alone was thine,—
> It may not sigh its springtime back,
> This withered heart of mine.
>
> C. W. Bennett.

The spirit was willing, but the flesh alas! was weak.

In pursuance of her good resolutions, and the plan she had laid down to herself, to perform her duty with the utmost fidelity to that husband who had been in a manner forced upon her—seeking his good, and studying his happiness in every way, Eleanor stretched out her hand with an affectionate smile to Randal, as he entered her room the next morning.

But his countenance was dark and repulsive.

"I am better," she said, "my dear Randal,—I am better."

"Are you, Eleanor? Do you suffer less? Is your situation somewhat less utterly insupportable than it was yesterday? Can you endure the thoughts of it and live? Or, is the effort to oblige us all too great? And would you be glad to die to escape from me?"

She looked at him sadly—astonished—confounded. Was this the man who had sat weeping by her bedside? Was this the man to whom, touched by his sensibility to her sufferings, she had, after that hard struggle with herself, been offering up such vows of affectionate fidelity?

She began to change colour fast, and her heart to flutter and beat terribly again, and Randal, as he stood there with his stern eye gloomily fixed upon her, observed these signs of hurry and emotion; but his face showed none of the tenderness which had so melted her the day before. He looked at her, rather as scrutinizing the expression of her countenance, and

endeavouring to gather the meaning of her distress, than as if melted to the soul by her agonies, as he had done yesterday.

He had, indeed, passed a wretched and sleepless night; and in the feverish distraction of his over-excited and now exhausted feelings, strange phantoms had visited his pillow, and the reflections excited by his distress had been far less benign, alas! than hers. He had not that softness and generosity of nature; he had not disciplined his heart for years, as she had done, by the simple endeavour to do in all things what was kind, and candid, and right; he had not, in short, her loving, sweet temper; and the effect produced upon him by these trying circumstances was, in consequence, far different.

He had his good qualities, we know; but they had been little developed; and, in spite of the gentle influence of the last few months, he was still full of terrible faults. Proud, irascible, jealous, and suspicious; severe in his judgments, prone to believe evil, and implacable in his resentment of it. Self-discipline, we know, he had never practised; and we know, too,

the erroneous nature of the discipline to which he had been subjected by others. For that which he had received from his parents might rather be called contradiction than discipline. And, certain it is, we may not indulge our children in the least; we may be, on the contrary, very severe, and without indulgence for their little inclinations and wishes, and yet not discipline them at all. Such contradictions and such severity, far from disciplining, only roughens and hardens; and as is found to be the case in cruel flogging at school, but prepares the subject of them to act the tyrant when their turn arrives.

And this had been the effect of Mr. and Mrs. Langford's iron rule. Their son had submitted to their authority as a matter not to be questioned, rather than from any genuine sense of filial piety or duty; and had, as a matter of course, adopted the idea that he should exercise the same unlimited authority when the sceptre devolved upon himself. His free agency had been fettered by the restrictions thus imposed; but to lay on fetters is not to teach a man to walk alone.

Randal had learned no one just principle of self-discipline, or self-guidance, under the system pursued. Nor had the intimate experience he possessed of his parent's characters had any happy tendency in improving his own. He could not but observe so much of profession in their piety—so much concealed and grasping self-interest beneath the systematic severity in judging every breach of the external laws of morality—so universal a distrust — so much censoriousness with regard to others, and so haughty an assumption of worth as respected themselves —that these things had greatly aggravated the faults of a character inclined to suspicion, and wanting in that candour, as well as in many other qualities, which spring from a temper naturally benevolent.

Eleanor alone had formed an exception to this habit of general suspicion, contempt, or ill-will. He looked upon her as one standing alone and individual, distinct from the rest of her sex; a sex, indeed, of which the reserve of his habits had enabled him to learn little, and whom he

despised, as under such circumstances men are usually inclined to do.

The excessive softness, pliability, and gentleness of this young creature, had acted as a gentle sedative to his stormy nature; whilst the simplicity of her childish confidence had given birth to a habit of confidence in her truth and sincerity, and the belief that no feeling heart was, or would ever be, disguised from him.

It is true, as I have told you, that this happy confidence had been in some degree shaken during his courtship. There had been still the appearance of openness; and in most things the simple unreserve of earlier years seemed to be maintained. But yet, under these fair outsides there had been a something—he knew not what — unintelligible, unaccountable; whether real, or imaginary, he found it impossible to decide—a sort of vague, undefined shadow, which would interpose between him and his happiness. A thing which took no tangible shape, eluded his grasp, and seemed to be dissipated upon the first attempt at explanation. If ever he alluded to its existence, there would be

for answer, perhaps, a painful smile, a slight blush,—then a confiding, trusting, affectionate look, which it was impossible for him to withstand. He remained enchanted and unsatisfied.

Her presence dissipated the vague uneasiness, but in her absence it was sure to recur; and during the time which had elapsed between his last visit to her father's house and the one which was to terminate in the marriage, many had been his unpleasant ruminations, during his solitary walks, which uncommunicated and uncontradicted sunk into his mind, and increased his uncertainty and uneasiness.

In this humour he had arrived at Lidcote Hall.

During the whole of the journey there he had sat silent and moody, leaning back in the corner of the seat he occupied in his mother's carriage, meditating upon these things, and forming resolutions, that, come what would of it, some explanation he would require from Eleanor, so as to satisfy himself as to the reasonable or unfounded nature of his suspicions before proceeding farther.

He would no longer suffer himself to be silenced by that painful embarrassed smile, or to be moved from his purpose by those sweet, pleading, yet confiding looks, ever so powerful with him; a candid and satisfactory explanation he would demand, and would not rest till it was obtained.

His disappointment and vexation upon his arrival at Lidcote, on discovering the situation of affairs; and that in all probability he should not be allowed even to see Eleanor during the whole of that evening, had been indeed great.

The slight but invincible obstructions which seemed to present themselves to impede the explanation which appeared so indispensable to the future peace of both, provoked him beyond endurance. And there was a something,—he could not exactly define what,—in the manner both of Lady Wharncliffe and of Everard, of which it was impossible to complain, and with which it was equally impossible to be contented, adding new strength to his undefined jealousies and suspicions.

The sight of her pale and suffering face

when he had at last been allowed to visit her, as there she lay in deep sleep, had haunted his pillow all that night. We have seen the unavailing efforts he made to communicate with her on the morning, before it was too late, and how all his attempts had been frustrated. We have seen the pale, haggard, half-distracted creature brought down to complete the sacrifice; but, perhaps, have hardly understood the deep and generous compassion with which Randal at the sight had been suddenly touched, or the tenderness of feeling with which he had watched her distress and sufferings.

The repeated assurances upon all sides that this appearance of suffering and distress was only the natural effect of circumstances so agitating, acting upon one of a frame thus morbidly sensitive and delicate, had for the moment reassured him, only too anxious to be reassured; jealousy and suspicion had given way to those fond feelings of tenderness and protection, which she had been so long accustomed to excite in his breast, — It seemed as if his passionate sense of

attachment and devotion was rendered more intense than ever, by the spectacle of her loveliness in this helpless disorder.

Her death-like faint,—his wild terror at the thought that this too tender creature might perhaps expire under the effects of her extreme agitation,—the pathetic idea of such a being, exposed to such a fate, had roused every kind sentiment of his nature; he had felt for her benevolently and generously, almost without reference to his own interests.

And such benign feelings had still possessed him, whilst there he stood in almost a trance of grief, watching her agonies as she lay before him upon her bed,—till perfectly unmanned by the spectacle, he had sat by her bedside weeping over her.

The death which he could not help anticipating as the consequence of these paroxysms, seemed to hallow, as it softened, all his emotions. Suspicion and jealousy could find no place beside such real sorrow. But as she sunk to sleep, and all immediate danger was evidently over—as he was persuaded at length to

leave her to her repose and go to his own room—as the angel presence was withdrawn, and he consigned to that painful brooding over his own thoughts which had made him the man he was, —still more the man he afterwards became,—things seemed to assume a new aspect.

The excessive distress and suffering he had witnessed, he began to feel certain could not be rationally accounted for merely by the nervous agitation natural to the occasion. His old suspicions and jealousies began to arise with greater force than ever, and in the dark watches of a feverish night, assumed a fearful intensity. He began to imagine that Eleanor did not, and had never loved him as she ought; and the agitating doubt began to assume the shape of cruel certainty; that her acceptance of him at all was due to the urgency, or rather tyranny of her friends, that he was probably indebted for the gift of that cold, trembling, shivering hand,—the touch of which he seemed to feel,—to this cause alone.

As the feverish irritation of his

nerves increased, his reflections became still more painful. He began to doubt everything—to lose his faith in her truth and sincerity, and to remember with pain, certain little passages of their lives in which he had seen her evade the confession of a fact through fear.

He began to dread that it had been so now; that under all this agitation something still more to be apprehended than mere indifference might lie concealed. As the sleepless watches of the night exercised their power of aggravating feeling and distorting objects, and destroying the perception of just relations, this fear increased to positive assurance.

He felt certain he had been betrayed, and that some dire secret lay hidden under this harassing mystery.

Therefore was his countenance cold and severe, and his voice dry and harsh, as he answered to the soft reception she had obliged herself to give him, and in which he thought he detected—and, most true, so there was—something not quite natural and unforced. That gentle smile — that

extended hand, which would, under other circumstances, have given him such delight, now irritated him as a something at once sweet and false—the more irritating, because of the sweetness which mingled with its falseness.

"I am better, my dear Randal; I am better," she had said, with the fond confidence that merely to assure him she was better was to restore him to comfort and tranquillity.

But the eye that met hers, as it was lifted up with the simple confidence which a determination to do right bestows even in the most trying moments, was dark and cloudy; and he had answered sadly, gloomily, almost angrily.

"Are you, Eleanor?—Do you suffer less?—Is your situation somewhat less intolerable than it was yesterday?—Can you endure the thoughts of being mine? Or is the effort to oblige us all too great? —And would you be glad even to die, so you could escape from me?"

At that, her heart began to tremble and to flutter again; that poor weak heart

which would give way, and never yet had stood by her in the trying hour.

"I do not know what you mean, Randal," she answered in a timid voice, casting down her eyes.

"Oh, but you do, you do, Eleanor!—you understand me but too well. I can see that by your downcast eyes and your blushes. You blush crimson—you blush scarlet; you understand me. Would to heaven I could understand you!"

She made no answer.

"Would to heaven, Eleanor, that I could understand all this! There is something hidden from me—something I ought to have been made acquainted with—something I ought to have known before it was too late—too late!—something which your cowardice—for that I know it is—has kept concealed from me, who ought to have known every secret of your heart. But, tell it me now—tell it me now," he went on, passionately, dropping upon one knee by her bedside, and looking earnestly in her face; "tell me the truth—tell it me at last—Death though it may

be to me, spare nothing—let me have it in its full bitterness. *Do* you hate me worse than the grave?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Then, why—what is it? Oh, your face, as you came down those stairs yesterday, haunts me like a spectre—your pale, distracted face of woe. Why did I not?—why could I not?—What spell held me back?—what spell bound you, that, like two passive machines, we should suffer ourselves to be forced forward—to be linked at the altar by the irreparable vows?—Vows, which if they are odious to you, will be abhorrent as hell to me. Yes," he went on violently, "abhorrent! To have your duty only—your cold respects—perhaps, not so much—your hidden aversion—your loathing—your detestation—when . . . . Oh, woman, woman! —to have them in exchange for such a love—such wild distraction—such passion as mine! Oh, horror of horrors!"

She muttered a few words faintly, but he listened not; he went on with increasing violence.

"Nay, don't speak—don't say anything—don't add perjury to perjury—falsehood to falsehood; don't attempt to deceive me more, with those honeyed tones and looks of yours! Oh, Eleanor, they are maddening to me! Say, you hate me—say, you abhor me—say, you detest the idea of being mine, and that will do me good; that will be truthful, searching, bitter, medicinal—and it will be curative. Yes; I can part with you—I can—I can; yesterday, I thought I could not; but to-day I can. Oh, there has been a great change wrought within me! Yesterday, I thought you true. To-day, I believe you to be false—to have been playing a dictated part—to have been a puppet in the hands of others. And such others! And now it is over, I can part—I *will* part; I can do it now!—I can."

Thus he hurried on, dreadfully excited; the more excited, because her silence, her distress, her evident embarrassment, only the more and more confirmed him in the belief that what had taken rise in an irritating suspicion was, in fact, a substantial

and terrible truth. That he *had* been deceived—that she *had* been, as he said, playing a dictated part—and to an extent which, in his darkest moments, he had never even ventured to surmise.

Suddenly, as a lightning flash, blasting and searing his heart, and reducing all his chance of happiness to a heap of blackened ashes, the thought recurred which had started into his mind a few hours before, for the first time. The thought that not only was he worse than indifferent to her, but that she might—that she did—love another. At that he laid hold of her tender hand, and pressing it fiercely in his, his eyes fixed upon hers with a look as if he could have murdered her, he cried, "I see it—I see it! fool! idiot that I was! And you, bad, treacherous, wicked, girl,—I see it. You love another, and you have married yourself to me!"

She went pale—she went livid—the soft, blue eyes stood staring open, glazed with terror, as he continued fiercely to fix his upon her; but articulate she could not,

though she seemed to gasp in the effort to speak. The longer he gazed the more terrible grew his convictions. The idea, broached in a wild agony of jealous suspicion, began to take consistency—to assume the form of a fearful fact. He dashed her hand from him, and striking both his against his forehead, uttered a deep groan; then starting up from his place by the bedside, he turned passionately away. He made as if about to leave the room in a frenzy of rage and despair.

Then a soft, still voice was heard through the tempest,

"Randal—Randal!—dear Randal, hear me."

"Hear you!—and what can you say? What can you have to say?"—returning to the bedside, and fixing again upon her those terrible glaring eyes,—"that you love another? Eleanor, will you have the impudence to confess that to my face—to my face; and do you not think I shall kill you? Yes, I shall kill you!" violently seizing hold of her shoulder,

"crush you to death! annihilate you"—shaking her as he spoke. Then, as if shocked to the very heart at his own brutality, he loosed hold of her, turned away, flung himself into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, began to weep and groan piteously. Eleanor gazed at him in horror, in terror; then, as his tears flowed, and his giant chest heaved with the emotions of a strong man in agony—with pity.

"Randal," she again said in a lower and more faltering voice, so that the gentle accents were hardly to be heard above her breath. "Dear Randal, have pity upon yourself and me."

"On myself!" he cried, starting up again; "What care I now what becomes of myself! Oh! Eleanor, Eleanor! *why* did you deceive me? On you, poor, weak, timid girl—the mere puppet of others—Pity upon you! Yes, I can have pity upon *you!* I shan't kill you, Eleanor, if that is what you mean—It was a mad threat! I shall not kill you."

"That was not it," she said, and

the tears began to gather to her eyes. "Though I do not wish to live, yet I am very much afraid to die—but it was not to beg my life of you, Randal, that I . . ."

"You *do* deserve death from my hands, then?" he exclaimed with a bitter sort of cry,—"Oh, worse! and worse! to what extent, to what amount, have I been betrayed?—Girl!—child!—woman!—what am I to hear next?"

She looked now more utterly amazed than anything else. What could he fear more than that she loved another? But when the true meaning of the insinuation reached her, her cheek was dyed with indignant crimson,—she turned away her head. That look, that indignant look, from one so gentle, was to him as the richest of blessings. Truth flashed conviction. He saw at once the unworthiness of his suspicions. That he had carried them too far, seemed in some measure to allay the violence of his rage at the discovery, that till that moment he had not carried them far enough. Again he sank down upon his knee by

her bedside; again he endeavoured to take the hand which now lay passive and motionless in his, and he said,—

"Forgive me, Eleanor, I beg your pardon, indeed I do; that last implication was, I see, I am certain, utterly groundless. Forgive me, for I am half mad with the idea of the rest.

"Speak to me, Eleanor; speak to me. Forgive what I said in my passion. Oh if you knew! if you could conceive what it is to have believed I possessed your love, and to find it all a deception, you would forgive this paroxysm of my despair."

His softened voice affected her; again she turned her face to him; and, after a little time spent in endeavouring to recover her composure, she said, in what was almost a whisper,

"I understand—I am very sorry. I have been very wrong—very much afraid, very weak,—but I did it for the best."

"The palliation of treachery and cowardice!" he cried.

"Treachery! do you call it treachery? Yes, you do right; you are severe, but

not unjust. It *was* treacherous, Randal; but can you not forgive me?"

She pressed her little soft fingers, tender as those of a tiny infant, round his hand, so hard and sinewy, as she said this,—and as the mother's inner heart trembles at her baby's grasp, so trembled his in its inmost core. She saw the softening of his eyes, and she went on. "It was very wrong, but I was under a strange delusion—I thought it would have been happier so. It seemed to me—and it would have been—if it had not been for . . . "

"No, Eleanor, there you were quite and altogether wrong. You could not hide your secret entirely from me. Enough had already escaped to poison my happiness with suspicion, and, now that I have lost my faith in you, it is gone for ever."

"I deserved it, I deserved it," she said; "and yet . . . "

"You deserved it! I know not, and I care not, whether you did or no. With me it is a necessary consequence. I loved you to idolatry, because I esteemed you perfect

as an angel. I loved you, as I never had, nor could, love other mortal being, because I thought no mortal being ever approached to you. I believed you to be all that was excellent and perfect; I find you like other women, like most men, a mere tissue of inconsistencies, right when not tempted, wrong when tempted —false, conventional, and seeming. And it is no longer *my* Eleanor,—I have lost *my* Eleanor—As for the thing called Eleanor Wharncliffe, that is an indifferent thing to me."

"It is a bitter speech, Randal . . . "

Then she was silent a few moments. She, in her turn, felt indignation rising. He was not just, now—he was cruel. She felt within herself, after the resolutions of the morning, that she was not quite unworthy of his esteem; that she deserved his affections, if not the unbounded adoration with which he had once worshipped her.

She was inclined, under this feeling, to say no more; to reject, as vain, the endeavour to melt one so implacable; but candour, blessed candour came to her

assistance; and, in the divine sweetness of her temper, she recollected how wrongly she had acted. She felt for the distress she had occasioned. She was generous enough to sympathize with his regrets over the matchless idol she had defaced. Her gentle humility softened the irritation excited by his bitter words. She thought now that he was bound to her irrevocably, bound by her own fault alone, for it was plain that, had he been aware of the truth of the case, nothing would have tempted him to the union—it was right, it was a claim alike of honour and duty. The only compensation she had in her power to make, was to endeavour to soothe his feelings and reinstate herself in his esteem. Such was the atonement she offered for her fault. The true and only one. And she offered it in all the sweet generosity of her nature—sincerely and fervently.

"You may justly reproach me, Randal. I see it now—I have done greatly wrong—but can you not forgive me? Oh! if I were to open this heart to you,—and

some time I will, indeed I will, but not now—I cannot do it now,—you would not be so unhappy; because I think you would not think so very, very badly of me as you do."

"Do you love another better than me? Did you when you married me?—When you made your vow to love me, was there some one else who stood by—in thought I mean—claiming you for his own? And was it that which sent you senseless to your bridegroom's feet? A bride! A pretty bride for a man!"

"Yes, Randal; at that moment there was . . ."

Again he seized her fiercely by the arm.

"Nay," she said, looking imploringly—for she began to feel very much afraid of him. She was no heroine, poor thing, and she morbidly feared to die; "don't, don't! you frighten me, Randal, indeed you do."

"Do I? then I am sure I shall never get the truth out of you," he said, scornfully. "Cowards cannot be terrified into

the truth; fear only sinks them deeper in lies—Lye on . . ."

"I was not about—I could almost say I would not. You are too taunting, Randal. The worm, it is said, will turn. I am a poor worm, but I have not deserved all this—for I meant faithfully and honourably by you when you came into the room this day—so help me God, in my uttermost need!"

"Faithfully and honourably! You did not intend to wrong me, then, in the grosser sense—actually by breach of faith. No, Eleanor, I shall not suspect you again of that. All I do suspect you of, and all I know that you have done, and still do, and intend to do,—is to withhold your heart when you have given your hand. And this I call a wrong, a fearful wrong,—Such a wrong as turns a man's heart to gall, as it has turned mine."

"I see it has," she said, despondingly.

"You see it has! How quietly that was said!"

"Do not quarrel with what I say, Ran-

dal, in this way. Believe me, I mean to do right."

"To do all for the *best*," said he, in a bitter tone. "Yes, go on—Play upon the weak, credulous fool again."

"What must I do?—what must I say?" she cried at last, bursting into tears. "Everything I say you take wrong."

"Because I do not know what to *believe*, what to think, or not to think—Because you, oh Eleanor! are become a hideous enigma to me.—I no longer know you, and feel that I have never known you."

"Randal," said she, suddenly rising up in her bed, and for the first time looking him courageously in the face, "how is all this to end?"

"I know not, and I care not," said he, recklessly.

"Because, Randal, I have done you a heavy injury, I own; but I wish to make you compensation—I owe you compensation. I did love another when I gave my hand to you, because I dared not, at that

moment, refuse it.—There was no time—my mother and brother were too hard for me.—I did very wrong, but I was forced, almost without power of resistance, like some poor vessel, swallowed up in a whirlpool. That I was dragged down to the lowest pit myself, who cared? Who cares? But, that I dragged you with me, Randal! —indeed, and indeed, that is it, that is it! I know not how it all passed.—It was like the hurry of a dream; I did not know where I was—how it was. I beg your pardon, Randal; I crave your forgiveness, Randal. I will be your faithful friend, your tender, obedient wife.—That is what I want to be, and will be.—Do not let us look back; it is over, it is gone. Forgive the wrong,—accept the offering. If you have not my first love, accept my sincere attachment, my undying gratitude; for I never shall forget what you have been —what you were even *then* to me. Oh! Randal! Randal! Won't you? won't you?"

How she pleaded! How earnest and sincere were those sweet eyes! what ac-

cents of truth in her voice! Once more the accent of sincerity was not to be mistaken. His countenance began to soften; the hand he held was pressed in both his. He looked at her, and was subdued.

And thus they began life together.

But alas! the pity! that the whole truthful confession was not at that moment made.

CHAPTER VII.

A fair pale girl,
Mild, patient, and serene.

CRABBE.

AND thus their hearts were restored to tolerable ease and comfort, though all the rapture of existence seemed gone. But the frame of the delicate girl was evidently injured by the agonies she had endured. It was days before she could leave her bed, weeks before they could venture to move her down-stairs, and at last allow her to begin the long-delayed wedding journey.

For true it was that the course of life she had undertaken was little formed to restore a strength so deeply impaired by mental agitation and anxiety as hers; for indeed it was a sore task she had imposed upon herself.

A man so susceptible, so jealous, so prone to suspicion as Randal Langford, his suspicions and jealousies once having been aroused, it was, indeed, no easy thing to satisfy. The proud delicacy of his affections, which led him almost haughtily to abstain from exacting the slightest proof of tenderness or attention upon her part, rendered him tremblingly alive to anything that could be construed into indifference. If she looked grave, he became gloomy; if she was more than usually silent,—his eyes, she felt, were immediately upon her. If in her anxiety to oblige him, she sometimes overstepped the limits of good taste and bordered upon the officious, he repulsed her almost angrily—if thus repulsed, she abstained from offering her services upon the next occasion, he was offended. He seemed impressed with the idea that every attention, however small, was merely offered in obedience to a sense of duty. If she looked out of spirits, it was because he could not suffice to make her happy; if pleased by anything else, it was only a fresh proof of her indifference. What she suffered

under all this, with her panting, fluttering nerves, and a heart whose functions were seriously and permanently disordered, it would be hard to tell: but this was not the worst.

There was added to all these causes for irritation, a fearful circumstance in married life—one subject, and that an enduring one, upon which neither of them chose, or rather dared, to touch. He had, in his pride and resentment, never alluded to it again, and she, in her timidity, had avoided, with the utmost care, even the slightest approach to it. It seemed that having forgiven her breach of confidence, or rather professed to forgive,—for, alas! how far, too often, is such profession from a genuine, heartfelt forgiveness—his feelings upon the subject forbade him ever again to touch upon it. Happy! if this self-restraint had arisen from a generous confidence, and a persuasion of the wisdom of letting a subject like this die away in silent forgetfulness. Unfortunately, there was more pride than confidence, more hidden resentment than tender consideration, in his silence.

At first, when the terrible subject having once been entered upon between them, she would have been but too glad to have renewed it. There was much left unsaid that she wished to say, many explanations to make which she wished to give. She wanted—it is a woman's feeling—to account for all her actions; explain the feelings, mistaken perhaps, but right-intentioned, from which they arose. She wanted to use the power all women believe they possess, of softening what had occasioned so much rage and passion, by the persuasive gentleness of their explanations; but no such opportunity was allowed her, and she wanted the courage to form one.

And then, as time passed on—as their relations began to take that conjugal form, which at once endears the husband to the heart, but establishes him as the master and lord—rendering him, whilst more beloved, more awful, more to be feared—changing the fond weakness of the lover into the more reasonable attachment of the man—when sometimes the story of that passage of his life at Cambridge recurred to her memory, and she recollected who it

was that had inflicted that fearful punishment; as she became better acquainted with her husband's character, and observed, with almost shuddering terror, the implacable violence of his resentments, her very heart seemed to die within her at the idea of the truth becoming known.

When she observed the invincible coldness with which he treated her father and mother, the haughty resentment cherished against her brother,—though shown chiefly by abstaining from all mention of his name,—when she remarked these and a hundred other smaller evidences of his unforgiving temper, she began to look with inconceivable terror at the idea of any explanation.

That the fatal name of him who had once been everything to her should escape, seemed every day more to be dreaded; till, by degrees, her anxiety to offer explanation changed into the most intense desire that the subject should never be renewed. And yet, in spite of this cankerworm of happiness,—a fatal secret on one side, and a proud sense of injury and hidden distrust upon the other

—both their hearts were too sincere to be utterly lost to each other. A love so pure and fervent his, a duty so tender and affectionate as hers, cannot be, without producing some precious fruits. Gradually a sweetness seemed to diffuse itself over their relations. The idol she was of his heart; in spite of all, and the idolatry would make itself felt in a thousand tender ways. He was her strength and her protector, and that tie is inappreciably dear to a woman.

He took her home after a wedding journey, in which they had visited Scotland, during a lovely summer season which had succeeded to the intemperate and stormy winter. And oh! what happiness at times he had enjoyed. The softness of her temper and disposition was as a healing balm to his heart—so pure, so holy, so soothing! Then her intellect and imagination, so susceptible of every impression—her intense love of beauty—the delightful harmony of thought and action—and that face, which to his doting eye, was lovely without parallel. The uncomplaining delicacy of health, which required so much

watchful care and devoted love; that humble and grateful disposition which received the commonest attentions with such thankfulness, and was evidently melted to the heart by his—those bewitching, womanly ways; that timid gaiety; and, above all, the unremitting desire to please him, and the unfeigned pleasure which shone in her now truthful eyes when she succeeded!—Do you think these things were lost upon him—did not entwine themselves round his heart of hearts?

That heart might be as a rock, but the rock had its fissures, and the tender plant twined itself among the cliffs, sending so deep those its delicate roots, that it got rifted, as it were, into his very being. Tear it up, and weak and fragile as it might seem, you would have shattered the tower of strength to atoms.

And so he brought her back at last, and installed his love at Ravenscliffe. He placed her there by the side of his cold grim mother; the contrast was only wanting to complete the enchantment.

It seemed as if, till he saw his Eleanor sitting a household possession by that

gloomy woman's side, that he had never even yet appreciated all her beauty and her sweetness. That fair delicate girl, with her sunny tender smile, greeting him whenever he entered the room—her golden hair illuminating, as it were, the darksome dreary chamber, which had till then appeared to him to lie under one heavy unbroken shadow. How lovely she would look! And how his heart would beat with fond pleasure as she addressed him!

Perhaps he would ask her to walk, always certain of her ready, happy acquiescence in everything he proposed;—yes, we may venture to use the word happy now. To his ineffable delight, he felt, too, that it was so. He saw when she spoke of herself as happy, that she spoke but the truth. He saw there had been no indulgence of forbidden longings, of vain regrets; but, above all, he saw that there had been no unnatural efforts made. Gradually this peace had come over them, they knew not either of them how. And she *was* happy.

The walks they used to take together!—roaming through the woods, or, sometimes, she seated upon her donkey, scaling the dis-

tant hills. And, at such times, how much her mind seemed to enlighten and expand his mind! Her warm, feeling temper to awaken the answering glow in his! Till her gentle and indulgent views of men and things gradually softened him to indulgence—her confidence in the good, gradually led him to have faith in the good, —to search for it, and to cultivate it.

Her old habits of active benevolence, you may rest assured, were not laid aside by the future mistress of the large domain of Ravenscliffe. Mrs. Langford had ever practised a good deal of ostentatious charity, it is true, but she was not a visitor of the poor. Her proud, unbending disposition rendered such acts of love a very irksome and disagreeable task; and, indeed, when performed, it was hardly less disagreeable to herself than to others, for so ungracious was her way of personally conferring benefits, that her poor neighbours were apt to think, and not slow to say, that the alms she bestowed was not worth having when exchanged for one of Madam's visits.

But with Eleanor it was indeed another thing. She never entered a cottage but to

shed light and warmth, as it were, around her. She was so full of love, so replete with genuine sympathy, tenderness, and goodwill—that the very gleaming of her eyes, the very tone of her voice, seemed in themselves enough to charm away pain and sorrow. She possessed, in truth, to the highest degree that happy gift of sympathy which endears to the inferior more than any other. And she had, in consequence, the power of conversing easily with the poor, drawing forth their feelings, and entering into their troubles—gifts enhanced by that blessed one of persuasion, which left all she conversed with better and happier.

He learned to visit the cottages with her,—for he loved to be wherever she was; and besides, she could not go unattended,—and attended by no other must she be. Indeed, he loved so, that he would never willingly have her out of his sight. It was now an ordinary thing to see that tall, dark, haughty young man standing, holding his wife's donkey, at the door of some humble cottage, among those wild heathy moors and hills,

his eyes following her as she entered, and his ears drinking in, not unmoved, the sweet persuasive accents of her voice, with a sort of tremulous love and joy.

Now, when she came out, she would be greeted, as he lifted her to her sheep-skin saddle, with a tender and fervent caress, or kiss perhaps, when no one was by, or a whispered, "My own love and angel, Old Gaffer looks all the better for your visit;" or, "I declare you are fit to take your degree in medicine, Eleanor," &c., &c., and then she would feel recompensed and happy, and a sense of stilly joy would creep over her.

Stilly joy! The rapturous sense of life had expired within her when Marcus had disappeared among the bushes. Her heart had died then; the heart which beats to ecstasy,—it was dead; that could revive no more,—Marcus himself could not have revived it now. In its place there was a gentle humble sense of thankfulness and placid enjoyment; for the racking suffering was at an end, and there was peace. To the feverish trance of passion had succeeded the sober glow

of a sincere and dutiful attachment. I say dutiful, for let people say what they may, the dutifulness of an attachment is no ill ingredient in aid of its durability and strength.

There can be no doubt that Eleanor loved Randal the better, because she *ought* to love him, and many others have felt the same salutary influence.

And now it is a sweet calm September evening, and the long shadows are falling round the Raven's Oak. The raven's busy work has long been over, and all is quiet in the huge nest above, for the leaves are beginning to assume their autumn tints. The view is beautiful this evening. The woods are rich with varied hues, and the river is dashing down the glen in wild force, for it has been well filled by a late rain, and the sun is setting behind the western hills, casting a golden light upon the prospect. A certain warmth and redness glows upon the rugged trunk of the Raven's Oak. They two sit upon a turf seat together, as was often their custom, and look upon the beautiful wild expanse that stretches out before them.

She had panted a good deal, and had felt very much tired as she came up the ascent; and he had felt anxious, and wanted to carry her, but she would not let him do that. She sank down, however, when she reached the turf seat, pale and breathless.

"My Eleanor, you are not well. You are not so well as usual this evening," he said anxiously; "What is the matter with my love?"

"Nothing more than usual, dear Randal. I cannot get strong, but I shall get stronger and stronger every day. This quiet life suits me so well—I am so happy here."

"Are you, Eleanor? Are you sure—quite sure—you can say that?"

She gave a little pinch to the large sinewy hand that lay beside her, and said:

"Yes. But if you ask that question again in that tone, mind, I will say, no."

He took her hand and kissed it. She was growing less and less afraid of him every day.

"I was going to tell you, if you had

not been naughty, how very content and happy I was; and how I enjoy this rest and tranquillity. I think there can be nothing upon earth to be compared to it.—I have not a wish for more.—And then, too," looking up at the tree "I seem so at home here. I feel as if that old tree had been my spiritual cradle—my heart's cradle, Randal, in which I had been lulled to comfort and security. You cannot think what a soothing effect the very sight of its old branches has upon me."

How he loved to hear her talk thus!

"Then you look back with pleasure to your childhood?—So do not I."

"Nor I—I am sure, except to one part of my childhood."

"I look back with rapture to one part of mine."

"That spent with you."

"That spent here."

This was the link—the strong link, they both felt it, that bound them together. Those with whom childhood has been passed are united by *one* indissoluble tie at least.

It was this which perhaps more than anything else enabled Eleanor's heart to triumph over its first passion, and to receive so much solace and happiness in the society of Randal. If she had loved Marcus with a force that no other being could inspire, there was a source of attachment with regard to Randal which none could claim but himself.

And so they sat there quiet and content, blest in each other's presence. But oh! her heart even then kept throbbing in a strangely painful and unaccountable manner.

And what had become of Marcus during all this time?

We lost sight of him as he plunged in a paroxysm of rage and despair into the thicket, as Eleanor was carried away by her imperious brother. His temper was as warm, his passions as high, as those of his rival, and his heart infinitely more susceptible. He was of a generous, loving, trustful nature; and had loved

Eleanor with all the strength of a fervent imagination and a most ardent temper combined. The extent of his misery at thus losing her was in proportion to the rapture the late meeting had inspired.

His first impulse, at this terrible moment, was instantly to leave the country and return to Ireland, without attempting to see the false one more — and under this impulse he had plunged deeper and deeper into the woods, ignorant of his way and indifferent where he went, so he fled from the spot where they had met.

The sun now faintly gleaming through the wintry clouds was before him — and the day was declining. That was therefore the west. Thither lay his country—that way he would go.

He pushed impetuously on, tearing and breaking down the crunching branches with an almost frenzied violence, but he came to no path-way. The wood stretched upon this side to a vast extent, and was bounded at its extreme limit by an extensive tract of mountain and moor, seldom traversed by the foot of men, being, it

might be said, almost a desert. Marcus had soon lost himself.

The clouds gathered over and again obscured the sun. He lost the points of his compass, and soon knew not in which direction he was proceeding. But he persevered, till at last, the wild violence with which he had dashed forward, yielded to the effects of fatigue and despondency. He began to relax his efforts, to look up and to look round, and to wonder where he was. He was on all sides surrounded by an almost impervious wilderness of leafless branches. Whichever way he turned the same trackless labyrinth presented itself. Soon the sun went down altogether, and so completely obscured by clouds, that a faint line of fading gold alone pointed out that quarter of the heavens in which he set. At this time of the year it was so far from due west, that it afforded a very faint indication.

And now the twilight gradually fell, and with it, the sleet and rain, and the wind began to howl and whistle mournfully, and the night promised to be rough and bitterly cold. To spend it thus, unpro-

tected as he was, except by the old tattered great coat which he had opened, seemed impossible. He had not so utterly lost his senses as poor Lear, and happily still retained his susceptibility to the pitiless storm.

He had paused—for some moments; and stood in a little opening amidst the underwood formed by the wide extended branches of a huge oak tree, which had checked the growth of the smaller plants. He rested himself against its huge trunk, sheltered from the weather for some time, by its thick canopy of branches, leafless though they were—but at length the rain and sleet completely penetrated even here, the wind rose higher and higher, wildly tossing the huge boughs to the sky. The heavy drops fell in showers upon him, and he was driven from his shelter.

Forward he must; it was impossible to remain where he was; and forward he again began to go.

But hours and hours elapsed, and he was still wandering in the wood, when the moon arose and threw a pale, fitful light upon the dreary scene. He paused

and gazed upon the planet as she waded through the heavy clouds, now rolling over and entirely obscuring her light, and now, torn into fragments by the still increasing wind, revealed her in all her glory, as she gleamed upon the interminable labyrinth of crossing branches.

The monotony of the scene was only relieved at intervals by the dark forms of huge hollies, which stood there like gloomy spectres of the night.

As he stopped to recover breath and spirits, and gazed upon the lovely light, he thought he heard the distant yelp of a dog. He listened attentively. Soon a cock began to crow and a faint light diffused itself over the eastern side of the horizon. The morning was evidently about to break, and this long night of agony to close.

In the direction from whence the sounds came, there must evidently be human habitations. He endeavoured to rally his spirits, now nearly exhausted by fatigue and anguish, and to renew his exertions to extricate himself. He had not proceeded much further, directed by the

yelping of the dog, and by the crowing of the cock, before he came to a place at which the wood became thinner. Spaces were seen at intervals, where woodmen had evidently been at work upon the undergrowth—then piles of fagots and bushes began to appear, and poles leaning against the trunks of the trees still left standing. And the cheerful tokens of human life and industry, succeeded to the wilderness of boughs in which he had been so long wandering.

Through the scattered oaks which remained standing, glimpses of the open country might now be faintly discerned by the advancing light; and numerous other rural noises began to succeed to those which had first excited his attention. At last the cheerful noise of the woodman's axe was heard, and the ruddy light of approaching day glowed all over the eastern sky. He followed the sound, and soon came to a clearing, where two men were at work.

Marcus went up to them, presenting, as he did so, a most uncouth appearance; for over the dress of a gentleman, the long

tattered coat of the beggar still hung, and the old worn-out hat had been torn to tatters as he forced his way through the branches.

The woodmen paused in their work, and looked up, wondering at the strange figure which approached.

"Good morning," began Marcus, with the air of cordial affability with which he was accustomed, in his own country, to greet and to be greeted. "This has been a terrible night for a man to spend walking about in a wood where he has lost himself. But I am out of it at last, and there must be some village or house of entertainment near. Will you tell me which way I must go to find some place where I can warm and dry myself?"

He was indeed by this time absolutely blue with cold.

"Show me the way, will you?"

"Sir," said the elder woodman, for by his tone of voice, in spite of his strange disguise, he at once felt assured the wretched-looking being before him, was a man of condition, "it has been an awful night, and you must be half dead.

Take a drop of my beer, and a snack of the bread and cheese that's for mine and my son's dinner here, and sit down upon them fagots for a bit, to draw a breath or so before you go any further. —You do look main weary to be sure. Down, Nettle, down!" to the little yelping cur, which kept springing about, and which was the one whom Marcus had heard.

The young man accepted the woodman's hospitality, if hospitality it may be called, with thankfulness. His limbs were unnerved by fatigue, his spirits exhausted by suffering, and besides—if truth must be told—he was young, in high health—and, moreover, he was a *man;* and rare are the distresses, however severe, which can prevent such an one from feeling hungry after a long fast. So he sat down upon the fagots, and fell heartily to at the bread and cheese and beer, the means of recompensing for which he had plentifully about him.

And now the sun began to rise in his glory behind the trees. But the east was all glowing with that dark, red, lurid

light which portends a troubled and stormy day. However the wind had lulled for the present, and the peaceful influence of the woodland scene about him in some degree soothed the tumult of the young man's spirits, and in some degree to abate his sufferings.

The birds were beginning to creep about in the branches, and to sing their pleasant songs of early spring. Strange cries and noises were heard in the woods, but every sound of a soothing and cheering character. The sun shone bright upon those huge vegetable columns — the trunks of the giant trees, which, cleared of the undergrowth, stood in such bold relief around him. And their long shadows fell upon the ground, giving a mysterious beauty to the fantastic shapes of the stubs which the axe of the woodman had left, amid rough grass and moss, where low creeping violets peeped forth with their blue eyes, and where the delicate pendant blossoms of the wood anemones, were growing in abundance.

The measured sounds of the ringing axes as they rose and fell; the crash of

the falling underwood; the whistle of the younger woodcutter, who was a mere boy—all combined to render this scene, like others of its class, one of the most cheerful and pleasing that rural life presents.

The young man felt its influence, wretched as he was—so he sat there for some little time, revived by the rays of the sun which fell full upon him, and soothed by an inexpressible sense of bodily comfort, such as the mere act of sitting down after such fatigue brings on. Thus he sat, and watched the proceedings of the woodcutters in that almost stupid pause of thought and feeling which characterises this sort of lull, after violent excitement either of body or mind.

He had been seated for what might have been, perhaps, something about half-an-hour, when the sound of a village clock was heard at no very great distance, striking eight. Upon this the boy looked up at his father, laid down his axe, and began to turn about, and cast his eyes towards the place where his jacket lay.

"Time enough yet, Bob," said the old man.

"Why, no," replied the youngster, "I must be gone, father. I must make myself a bit spruce, you know; and we have to begin ringing the bells at nine—so says Will Sexton—at least be ready at nine. It will take me a good quarter of an hour to get home."

"And another quarter to put thy coat on and wash thy face and hands; for bless thy heart, pretend as thou wilt, thou canst do without the razor yet. Five minutes more to be in the church porch, bell-ropes in hand; so there is a good twenty minutes' time left for work yet. Lend a hand—hew away. Wouldst leave thy father at this tough piece of Service-wood by himself? Down with it, lad, and then off with you."

The boy struck away with might and main, and the hard, half-grown timber of the Service-tree gave way. It came crashing down, bringing many of the smaller shrubs with it. The two woodmen paused to take breath after their efforts, and then the father said,

"Now off with thee, if thou wilt, boy."

The lad turned gladly away, and coming up to where Marcus sat, said,

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir; but, if you please, you are sitting upon my jacket;" which, indeed, the father had folded with his own, to make a sort of cushion for his guest.

Marcus rose up, and observing the haste in which the boy sought for and began to put on his dress, made the remark,—

"You seem in a great hurry."

"So I am, and well may be; for the wedding's fixed for a little after nine—and there'll be a sight to see for a king. Such a power of carriages and great folks, all as fine as five-pence,—and the bells ringing, sir! Them gentry give a pretty lump of money among the bell-ringers, sir, as rings them into *happiness*;" and he grinned. "I wouldn't be behind time for I don't known what; for old Will Sexton is as grumpy as the east wind—And if I ben't at my post, rope in hand, as he expects, to the minute, see if he do not get some other Jack Straw to take my place, and

deuce a halfpenny shall I see of the money."

"A wedding!" repeated Marcus, turning suddenly pale. "A wedding! A wedding of great folks? Did you say a wedding?"

"Did I say a wedding! And why shouldn't I say a wedding?" responded the youth, looking at him with a face in which shrewdness and simplicity were oddly mingled, and which was now distended with a broad grin. "Why not a wedding in our little, tumble-down, ricketty church as well as in any minster of them all. A wedding! Ay, to be sure—and a wedding for once in a way, I can tell you. I question whether his royal majesty King George had a grander."

"Why!—who?—what?—whose?"

"'Why!—who?—what?—whose?' why, whose but Miss Wharncliffe's, of Lidcote Hall, in our parish, as is going to be married to one Mr. Langford, of Ravens-cliffe in county o' Durham, they say. He as is heir to one of the finest estates in this part of the country, and a power of fine things besides—and what?—But there have been great doings set about—and an

ox to be roasted whole upon the village-green—and the bells! Huzza for the bells! But I shall be late," added he, hastily completing his toilette, and clapping his cap firmly upon his head. "I must have a run for it."

"Stay!" cried Marcus, catching him by the arm. "What did you say?—Miss Wharncliffe, of Lidcote Hall?"

"Ay, Miss Wharncliffe, of Lidcote Hall. And what is that to such a one as you?" said the boy, laughing. "You're not a-wanting to marry her yourself, I reckon. Let me go, will you?" struggling.

"Stay! stay! Nay, go—nay, stay."

And then as if he had taken a sudden resolution, "Show me the way to your village and I'll pay you well."

"A matter of a sixpence or so," said the boy, glancing at the young man's upper garment. "Howsomever, I'll do it."

And turning into a small path which here crossed the wood, he led the way, walking as fast as he possibly could without breaking into a run, and Marcus followed.

They soon came to the verge of the wood, and arrived at the top of a gentle descent, from which they could obtain a view of the little village below. It stood there nestling among the hills, occupying a mountain valley, which at this place had widened a little, and through which a wide and shallow mountain stream ran sparkling in the sun.

The houses lay scattered about, interspersed with a few stone-enclosed fields and gardens, which were now beginning to assume their early green. The smoke from the chimneys came curling up into the morning air; the people might be seen moving about, and the sound of voices, mingled with that of dogs, of lowing herds, cackling geese, and crowing chanticleers was heard. There was an air of bustle more than common about the little secluded place; it showed that something unusual was in anticipation.

The small lowly church, hoary and time-worn, its narrow and low-arched windows, half hidden with the ivy which ran climbing on every side — its dwarfish tower, rising at one end with the weather-cock

gleaming above it—stood at the further side of the little assemblage of houses. It was shaded by one or two enormous elm trees, whose huge arms seemed almost to cross over it, and surrounded by the grave-stones and tumbling heaps of earth raised centuries ago over the long-forgotten dead; and now neglected and almost hidden by long grass and weeds.

"It's there, sir. There it lies, our village of Watherstone," said the boy, pointing towards it. "And there's our church, sir—a small bit of a thing as you see. And the tower a thought dumpy, as I have heard folk say,—but in it as fine a ring of bells as belongs to all Yorkshire. They were given, time out of mind, by some one or other of them lords of Lidcote, when Lidcote had lords instead of being only Sir Johns. And those bells we'll ring, won't we? and give them such a bob major as they goes out of town, as they hasn't often heard. There's the road they comes by. You see it on that side, right up the village—and a fine procession they are to be."

Marcus made no answer.

He looked for a moment in a sort of

bewildered confusion at the road, the church, the village—then he plunged suddenly down the descent, following the boy, and soon found himself in the place.

"It's may be you'll be wanting a public-house," said the youth, as they entered. "There's the Wharncliffe Arms,—do you see it? It's a decent place enough."

"Is there no other?"

"No—one public is enough for us—for we're decent people, at Watherstone," said the boy, laughing. "At Kilcot, now, t'other side of the wood, if they haven't got five! But that lies on the great road."

There was no help for it. Marcus turned under the shelter of the Wharncliffe Arms, entered the kitchen and asked to speak to the landlady.

He soon made the good woman acquainted with his wants, which consisted of a new hat and a decent great coat. The new hat was purchased at the village shop; the great coat obtained from the landlord; and thus equipped, Marcus sat down at the casement of the small private parlour of the inn, which commanded a

view of the street, to watch what was going on.

He was able to do this with a composure which surprised himself; but the truth was, that in spite of all he saw he had the most firm and intimate persuasion that, planned though it might be, and every thing prepared as it might be, this unnatural wedding never could nor would take place.

The look which Eleanor had cast upon him, even in the moment when she suffered herself to be forced away, was ever present. True,—she had suffered herself to be torn from him by her imperious brother;—but that look! There was a world of promises—of unchanging love—undying fidelity, in that last look! It was not credible, not possible, after what had passed, that this day,—the very next day,—she should give herself to another. Women were inconstant and infirm of purpose, frail by nature; but it was not in woman to be guilty of such a glaring defiance of all the laws of constancy and honour as this.

And yet it was not without extreme

irritation and feelings of alarm, that he saw the preparations so busily going on around him,—watched the people of the village coming out and going in, busily occupied in adorning themselves or their houses,—saw the windows filling one after another with pots of geraniums and myrtles,—the garlands of early spring flowers and greens hung across the street,—and the white ribbons beginning to flutter from the casements.

It was, however, sad unlucky weather for the good people. The wind, which kept rising, whirled about the branches and garlands, strewing the street with leaves and flowers, requiring to be constantly swept away, as did the several triumphal arches to be re-arranged. But the people were indefatigable, and in the highest good humour; and the sudden gushes down of sleet and rain, which scattered and drove them hurrying into their houses, were only greeted with peals of laughter. No sooner was the gust over than the street was crowded again.

But now the rain has ceased,—the clock, in the corner of the little parlour,

points to half-past nine, and the hostess arrayed in all her finery,—a handsome silk gown, a scarlet shawl, and a new bonnet with a profusion of white ribbons,—enters the room, under pretence of poking the fire, to show herself. And then she gives the last finish to the arrangement of the rose-trees and myrtles, with which her little window is decked out.

Every head in the street seems now turned, as if in silent expectation, one way,—that by which the carriages are expected to appear. The hostess goes to the window, puts her face close to the panes, tries to look down the road, and listens attentively,—

"I don't hear them coming,—do you, sir?" says she. "It's very odd I don't hear them coming!"

And the heart of Marcus begins to beat fast with triumph.

"I thought they'd have been here ere now,—at least, that Jock, who's on the pony there at the Stone Cliff turn, would have come spanking in to give notice long before this time."

She kept looking out.

"I wonder they don't come."

His secret previsions began to assume the form of certainties. "No, they will never come," said his heart; and he began to breathe more freely, and to enter into conversation with his hostess, and venture to question her a little, and ask concerning the family of the Wharncliffes,—as to the reputation in which they stood in the country, and so on.

She gave him the usual answers to such queries,—doing pretty full justice to the qualities, whether good or bad, of each of its members,—which are usually perfectly well understood and appreciated by great people's inferiors and neighbours. Gradually, as his security increased, the talk became more animated; and he was dwelling in secret delight upon the picture drawn of "sweet Miss Wharncliffe," by the landlady,—when, suddenly,—

It was the clattering of a horse's hoofs, which was heard coming at full speed up the village, and the landlady stopped speaking,—joyfully clapped her hands, and

crying, — "They are coming!—They are coming!" hurried out of the room.

It was now all bustle and joyous confusion without him—all wildest dismay and confusion within.

"Coming! Coming!" He seemed to hear the carriages—he does hear them. And what is to become of him?—What shall he do? — Whither go? — what? — whither, but to the church?—Yes, to the church. Treacherous, inconstant, heartless woman! Yes, to the church—To meet her there—to stand by, and see that worthless hand given unblushingly to the man she, but the night before, abhorred—In the presence of the man that, but the night before, she had professed—oh, how vainly!—to love. And all for what?—for Ravenscliffe—for gold—for position—for pride!—For, as for the poor, ruined Irishman, what was he?

"Yes, he would see her—he would see her. After that odious sight he should hate her—he should return home cured—he should be able to obey his parents—They might marry him to whom they

would — he cared not. He could lose nothing and gain nothing now. Eleanor—Eleanor Wharncliffe—that woman—that angel type of womanhood—was treacherous, hard-hearted, interested, false;—and all women were the same to him now."

He rushed from the parlour; and as the sound of the carriages were heard rapidly approaching by the other end of the village, hastily entered the little dusky church and hid himself in the obscurest corner. He saw the oak-table, which represented the altar, standing at the east end, under the ancient window, darkened with heavy stonework and dim discoloured glass. Upon one side of it there remained a very antique pew, covered in, as one sometimes sees in old churches, by a sort of oaken roofing, and with a grating of oak in front. This he entered; and, with his face close to the grating, completely hidden by the surrounding obscurity, sat there in a paroxysm of rage and indignation which exceeds description, to watch this climax of shameless treachery in woman.

There he sat—his temples burning—his heart as if bursting—his eyes fixed upon the door by which they were to enter; and there he witnessed what you already know. He saw the pale, haggard spectre, dragged forwards by her brother, supported by her mother; and met, at the very steps of the altar, by a bridegroom scarcely less pale and spectral-looking than herself.

And his heart!—Oh, how its feelings changed! And, oh! with what eyes, and with what sensations, did he listen, whilst that pale, death-like creature muttered her vows almost inaudibly—and the ring was placed upon those pallid, nerveless fingers. The loud cry which burst from his lips, as she rolled in a death-swoon down the steps of the altar, might have been heard amid the dire confusion had there been any ear to listen. But there was none.

He shrieked, and with sudden violence started up, making as if he would rush madly forwards to snatch her—dying as she was—from the arms of him who was no true husband of hers!

But the blood rushed in torrents to his brain; his eyes became dim; all objects swam around him; he was no longer sensible where he was, and he fell senseless upon the floor.

CHAPTER VIII.

Haggard and hollow and wan, and without either thought or emotion,
E'en as the face of a clock from which the hands have been taken.

LONGFELLOW.

THE loud peal of bells, as it burst forth merrily from the tower of the little church, awakened Marcus from his death trance. Gradually his senses returned, and intelligence and memory began to recover their powers. He rose with some difficulty from the ground upon which he had fallen, and looked around. The altar was deserted, the church completely empty, except that one old woman was slowly walking up and down, locking up the pews. She was proceeding to lock the church-door, when Marcus, though unable as yet to walk,

attracted her attention, by making a noise against the door of his pew, and she turned round, with no little trepidation in her looks, at this sudden noise in a place she thought quite deserted. At his signals of distress, however, she at last ventured to approach the place.

Seeing her still look very much frightened, Marcus spoke to re-assure her.

"I have been taken ill; I have fallen I suppose into a swoon.—How those cursed bells do ring!—Wait a second or two till I have a little recovered myself, and then let me out of church."

"Dear me," cried the good woman, now coming up close to the side of the pew, "what a day this has been *to* be sure! Why, sir," seeing the handsome young gentlemen, who pale as death, still leaned his head against the side of the close pew, or rather pen, in which he was shut up. "you look desperate bad yourself—and, lack-a-day! what an awful wedding it *has* been! We all thought the bride, pretty creature, was gone, quite gone!—But what a face she came up the church with! Such a face for a bride!

Why it was like death!—And you, sir, you look just as bad at this very moment."

"I don't feel well, but I shall be better if you will let me keep quiet a minute or two.—Don't lock the church-door, and I can let myself out.—Don't let me keep you waiting."

"Oh! that it doesn't at all, sir, or if it did that would be no odds, for there's no hurry—I reckon the dinner won't be ready yet awhile, for they've had a power of trouble to roast the ox on such a plashy day as this, forced to cut it up," &c., &c.

"But the bride!—The bells ring—The bells keep ringing merrily,—merrily!" he said, with inexpressible bitterness. "So I suppose the bride recovered herself and is gone!"

"Yes, sir, she came to herself in a fashion at last—But as for being gone, she's only gone back home to Lidcote Hall, sir—and trouble enough, Mr. Austin's young man says, they'll have to get her there alive."

"Alive!"

"Yes, sir, for she's mortal bad, he says."

"Let me out—open this," fumbling hurriedly at the pew-door—but his head was still in such confusion, and his hands trembled so excessively that he could not do it. "Let me out!—Let me out!"

She assisted him to open the door, and he managed to get himself out of the pew; but he had made but a few paces down the aisle before his confusion and dizziness returned. He was forced to sit down upon one of the benches and ask the woman to open the door and give him air.

And the joyous bells kept pealing, pealing over his head.

"You seem very bad, sir," said the good woman compassionately; "Let me fetch you something."

"No, no!—Nothing, nothing!—Stay by me a little, that is all. Stay by me. Tell me, are they only just gone?"

"The last carriage had only just driven away when the bells began to ring—may be five or six minutes ago. People were a good while getting off, it was all such a mess. But the bride and the bridegroom, and Lady Wharncliffe, and Mr. Austin,—

that's our doctor, sir,—have been gone above this half hour."

"Is it far from this to Lidcote Hall?"

"About three miles, sir."

"And you said—How did you say—She went—how was it she went. They got her into the carriage,—how, how——"

"Oh, sir, such a wedding as this never sure was seen afore; but it's a long story, sir."

"Tell it me, however, if you please."

"You must know," said the good gossip, coming up close to him, and speaking in a lower voice, "Miss Wharncliffe as was, has been in a bad state of health for some time,—that is, ever since the family returned from foreign parts to Lidcote Hall, which is now some months back; and it was very well known among the servants, and got down here, because, sir, of course we are all *interested* in what concerns the family, and especially the dear children. Well, sir, it was talked among the servants as how sweet Miss Eleanor had had a unfortunate attachment, sir, at a place they called Cheltenham—or some name of that sort—and how

as she had been very illused by a young gentleman, who, after having courted her a long while, and seeming to love her as the apple of his eye, and all that, suddenly takes himself away, no one knows why—and without having made his offer like a man—as the servants all believe. And they say, moreover, Miss Wharncliffe has been fading,—fading like a flower, sir, ever since, poor thing—And then the narves, sir, it got upon the narves—and her poor heart got all in a flutter like; and some said it was a consumption, and some said one thing and some another, but she grew very weak and thin, and wasted and wasted.—So, when nobody knows what to think or what to do, all of a sudden comes a resolution to pack up their alls, discharge the Cheltenham servants, give up the house, and come back to Lidcote Hall in no time. That last, sure and certain, sir, if it were not for Miss Eleanor being so bad, would have been the best thing ever happened for the country. Well, they didn't come down straight. They stopped a good time

on their road, at a place called Ravens-cliffe. That's the bridegroom's father, sir, who's cousin-german to Sir John or my lady, I don't rightly know which—and there Miss Eleanor and the young gentleman were very thick together, for sure they knowed each other from childer—and so Miss Eleanor began to look a little better, and lo and behold! by-and-by a match is cooked up between them! But, as says the upper-housemaid, who told me — for she's my sister's daughter, sir, and we got the news from her—but, says she, 'True love is true love, and it's my opinion, Miss Eleanor has never had her heart in the right place about this business—for,' says she, 'haven't I caught her crying by herself many and many's the time, when I be come in just to look at the fire. To be sure, she'd be for drying her eyes in a hurry like, and trying to look as if nothing was the matter; but I knew by her voice, when she bid me come in, and by her red eyes and pale cheeks, poor dear, that she'd been crying. Oh! the tears and the tears that poor dear young creature *has* shed

from first to last,' says Betty—that's my niece sir—'and all for that false and wicked young Irish lord—with his flatteries and his courtships,—and meaning nothing at all.' Isn't such conduct very bad, sir, on the part of men? And it's only last Sunday, as Betty was sitting at her mother's, and talking it all over—'And see if she comes alive from her wedding,' she said, 'If, indeed, it ever comes to that; but it wont,—mark my words,—it wont.' However, sir, you see she was wrong there, for to a wedding it has come. But mercy upon us, such a wedding! Was there ever such a one seen but in an old ballad. It wanted only the young knight, upon his big black horse, to come and carry the poor pale bride away,—did it, sir?"

"I said—I said—will you—undo—undo——"

He was fumbling at his neckcloth—he seemed choking.

"Bless me, sir! How ill you are! There—there, let me lay you down a bit on the ground; the bench is so narrow. There's a hassock for your head. My

goodness! If he isn't like death itself! My gracious! If he isn't gone off in a dead faint again!"

He lay there once more insensible. And the merry bells kept ringing a joyous *volée* over his head; and the sun—for the clouds had cleared away—came glistening in cheerfully through the lowly windows of the church. The birds burst out singing in the overhanging trees, and the noise of children at play came cheerfully sounding to the ear. For it was a universal holiday, and everybody, now the sun at last began to shine, was gay and gladsome as gladsome could be.

The pew-opener, with a pale, anxious face, kneeled down beside the dying man. Presently, the still open door of the church tempted little children to come peeping in.

"Bless your hearts," cried the woman, "some or other of you run as fast as legs can carry you for Mr. Austin's young man. Tell him here's a gentleman a-dying in the church."

The news spread like wildfire; people soon came crowding in.

"Keep off! Keep out, can't you, for pity's sake? and do stop them bells. Oh! it rings one's heart out of one to hear them, and a poor fellow-creature lying here dying all the while."

The young man, Mr. Austin's assistant, now appeared, and with him came the landlady of the little inn. The report had reached her, that a young man had been found very ill in the church, and she suspected, by the description, that it might prove to be her singular visitor of the morning. His good looks, and the mystery which seemed to hang about him, had rendered a very interesting person in her eyes. She soon discovered it was as she suspected; and as she stood there, beside the young medical man, her eyes were fixed upon him in pity and silence. The gloomy termination of the wedding had saddened her heart, and this fresh catastrophe completed her dismay.

He lay there, quite insensible, at her feet, and life seemed extinct, for he was pale and cold as marble. The young surgeon, however, stooping down, felt the pulse; the feeble flutter of life was still

discernible. He opened a vein. "Mrs. Kilwood, run for sal-volatile."

Slowly the currents of life began to flow again, and at last he opened his eyes.

"Where am I?—where am I? What has happened?—where am I?"

"Why, sir, you're in the church as yet," said Mrs. Kilwood; "but it's very cold here, you lying upon the stones too, and you seem very ill. Wouldn't you please to have me get you carried to my poor house, and laid in a warm bed?—Wouldn't that be best, Mr. Deacon?"

"Undoubtedly. It is not only the best, but absolutely necessary. Could you have a mattress fetched, and two or three men to carry him? He's desperately ill."

They got him with difficulty to the inn; fainting-fit followed fainting-fit. At last they succeeded in getting him to his bed, and Mrs. Kilwood sat down by his side to watch.

It was evening before he recovered his recollection, so as distinctly to be aware where he was or what happened. At

last he came to himself sufficiently to recall, in some degree, the circumstances of the last six-and-thirty hours. The first question he put was, "Had they heard how things were going on at Lidcote Hall?"

"Yes, sir, for I could not help sending my Tom to bring word; for sure, sir, one couldn't have let all those poor thoughtless things have sat down to their feast, and our young lady really dead. It would have been almost sacrilegious, sir. But they've had their dinner, poor bodies! for Miss Wharncliffe's not dead, nor will die now, says Mr. Austin, who's just come back, and stepped in very civilly to tell me—for he knows how anxious I am, for I was an old servant of the family, sir.

"Such a fearful strait, he says, he never saw poor creature in. It was worse than a death agony, body and soul fiercely striving for mastery. It was as much as he could do to keep them together. And the bridegroom, too—One cannot altogether help feeling a deal for him, though he is such a dark forbidding-looking young man—and I doubt whether

it has been all fair play—he, standing there at the foot of the bed, pale as a ghost, and shivering and gasping . . . ."

"Thank you, I don't want to hear any more," said the patient, turning abruptly in his bed, and making as if he wanted to go to sleep; to which she left him.

It was about three weeks, or might be something more, after this, that Mr. Sullivan was sitting in that little cell-like apartment to which you have been already introduced. He was seated upon one of the two wooden chairs, leaning his elbow upon his bare wooden table, and his cheek upon his hand. His eyes were fixed upon a human skull, which lay before him, and he was meditating very mournfully.

He had suffered agonies since the departure of Marcus. The displeasure of the father; the harrowing distress of the mother, at her son's mysterious disappearance; the reproaches of his own heart, which would make itself heard,—that

good, honest heart of his, which not all the sophistries of his understanding could silence — had conspired to produce an amount of wretchedness that it was scarcely in human nature to bear.

The first agony of terror as regarded the young man's life had not, however, lasted long. Marcus had the consi-eration, at the first place where he stopped for the night, to remember his mother's habitual terrors, and had written her a few lines, which in the due course of a most slow and circuitous post reached her. In these he assured her that he was safe and well, and should return home in a short time,—or if he did not, that she might rely upon his giving her intelligence of his movements and proceedings. This note was all that had as yet reached them, but it had been enough to allay the mother's distracting apprehensions, and to assist Lord Fermanagh's exhortations to fortitude and patience. In this instance the exhortations and assurances of the firm and sensible man whom Lady Fermanagh was so blessed as to call husband, proved more

effectual than the trembling remonstrances of the priest, who, a prey to mortal anguish himself, was quite incapable of supporting the spirits of another.

Lord Fermanagh was, in fact, not very anxious. He placed implicit confidence in the courage and good sense of his son; and now that the circumstances of the case were fully understood, he felt little doubt that he comprehended the reason of his sudden disappearance. He fully approved of the motives by which he believed him to be actuated, namely, impatience to seek Miss Wharncliffe again, to explain what had taken place, and to vindicate his own honour. It would have been better, he felt, and to himself a source of infinite satisfaction, if Marcus, before his departure, had made known his intention, and placed confidence in his father; but he felt how little this was to be expected. Deceived and deluded as his son had been, and more particularly as regarded his own participation in the scheme for deceit,—believing his parents were privy to and authorizing the wretched breach of good faith to which he had been

a victim—he was not very likely to make a friend of either of them.

Lord Fermanagh was a man of excellent understanding and of the most delicate honour himself, more especially as regarded women. He belonged to that old school which was used to treat them with chivalric respect, and he could appreciate the motives of his son's conduct.

No slave of priests himself, he was not sorry to see Marcus thus emancipated from the yoke so soon as he discovered how unworthily the power claimed had been abused. And yet, like most of us, this good and sensible man lay, more than he was himself aware, under the influence of old habits of thought, and of the feelings and prejudices of those around him. Secluded from society in general, and in every relation of life surrounded by rigid Catholics, he still acknowledged, to a certain degree, the authority of the church to which he professed to belong, and, in spite of the excellence of his understanding, allowed a considerable confusion to take place in his ideas upon such subjects. He con-

founded the administrators with the thing administered—the form with the matter—the priest with the religion.

He, therefore, much as he detested the idea of the deceit which had been practised, treated poor Mr. Sullivan with a consideration he would have shown to no other man under the same circumstances. He banished him neither from his presence nor from his table. He saluted him, when they met, with courtesy, though not without a certain coldness; exchanged a few sentences with him at meals; and betrayed nothing in his manner which might diminish that respect and reverence which, it was his principle, the priest ought to meet with in every Catholic gentleman's family.

Yet, in spite of all this appearance of consideration, there was that about his patron which cut poor Mr. Sullivan to the heart. There was nothing of which he could justly complain; nothing of which he could ask the explanation, had he dared to do so. Things remained apparently unaltered,—but the heart in them was no more. The cordial

kindness with which he had ever been met, the almost tender respect with which the good and sensible Lord Fermanagh had been accustomed to treat him gone — exchanged for a quiet, but invincible reserve.

Poor Lady Fermanagh, too. She was utterly miserable — miserable in all the thousand different ways in which misery invades the weak. Miserable from terror on her son's account—miserable for Miss Vernor—horrified at the idea of a Protestant connection,—but far, far more unhappy than from all these circumstances combined, when she looked at the face of her priest as he sat at table with Lord Fermanagh.

She, too, felt as if she had nothing of which justly to complain — nothing upon which to remonstrate; but she felt intuitively, as Mr. Sullivan did, the alienation which existed between her husband and her confessor. She watched the pale, mortified, troubled countenance of her poor friend, every day; saw him look more and more ill and unhappy, and her heart bled with his.

She felt little sympathy for the sufferings of the justly-offended father. She could only feel for her priest—He was the martyr—he was the great object of interest. For thus she justified his conduct to herself. He had been mistaken, but it was with the best intentions—had he not been devoted all through to what he thought the best interests of his church. Erroneous he might be, perhaps, in some of his views; but, alas! how he was suffering! The excellent man!

But Mr. Sullivan, as we have seen, did himself more justice. He suffered acutely from the desertion of Marcus—from the coldness and alienation of his father; from the tears and endless lamentations of poor Lady Fermanagh; but the grief lay deeper still. It was the war within—the self-condemnation—the revolt of his natural, good, honourable self—against the vile precepts of casuistry to which he had been a victim, which sharpened the stings of his misery. How distressed he became! How wearied and depressed during the celebration of those splendid rites of his church in which he was wont to take so

much pleasure! How hesitating and unsatisfactory at the altar!—In the confessional, how feeble and inefficacious! He felt that his influence and authority were rapidly declining, even among those who loved him best—even amid that rude, uneducated flock which had once seemed to hang in deferential reverence upon every word that issued from his lips. With his own self-respect, the respect of others was gone. He no longer reposed under the conscious strength of Lord Fermanagh; no longer felt his heart warmed and softened by his affectionate regard for the lady; and, above all, no longer met the frank, animated, loving eye of the beloved son—that boy, who had been from his cradle to the poor solitary man, as in the place of everything.

He no longer felt that atmosphere of love surrounding him, and filling his heart with those sweet sensations which had once rendered him so happy—A poor ice-bound heart it was now.

He was like one shut in amid the wintry

ice of the polar seas, whose every power of exertion, as of enjoyment, sinks under the chilling influences which surround him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Where towers are crushed, and unforbidden weeds,
O'er mutilated arches shed their seeds.

WORDSWORTH.

POOR, mistaken Mr. Sullivan! Poor, lost, bewildered Mr. Sullivan! Poor, forsaken Mr. Sullivan! There he sits in his little chamber, rests his pale cheek upon his hands, and, fixing his eyes upon the dreary monument of mortality, which lies before him, thinks—

Of what does he think? Of his church? Of his creed? Of his Saviour. Of his God? Of repentance, faith, and hope? Oh! no. He thinks only that Marcus is gone away, and that Lord Fermanagh is

unkind; and that he has been cruelly misled in all that he has done. And he wishes to die. He wishes to go into his grave, poor man, and have done with it all, like the once tenant of that poor skull. For some way that faith, of whose consolations he is so greatly in want, seems to forsake him in the hour of his need.

His vain superstitions prove their emptiness now. He may repeat his Liturgy to the Virgin; he may thread prayer after prayer upon his rosary; these things did very well whilst life flowed easily forward, and nothing in it deeper than these pastimes of devotion. But now the stern reality of great sorrow is upon him, and they, like the shifting foundation of sand upon which they rested, have altogether sank away beneath his feet.

Thus he was sitting, poor, melancholy man, in this saddened mood, when a hand suddenly lifted the latch of his door, and a figure entered. Not Marcus! Oh, not Marcus! but the spectral image of Marcus.

The priest uttered a cry, rose up, extended his arms, and would have clasped him to his breast; but the spectre

sternly held him back, and refused the embrace.

"Marcus! Marcus! my son! my son!" The chest of the poor priest heaved convulsively, as, bursting into a flood of tears, he turned away.

The face of the young man twitched once or twice, and a softened expression was visible in his eye. He followed the old man, laid his hand gently upon his shoulder, and said—"Mr. Sullivan, don't hurry yourself; I am afraid I surprised you."

At this, the priest ventured to lift up his face again, looking at Marcus—oh! so wistfully and tenderly—and then, unable to contain longer, flung himself upon his breast (to which his own head just reached), clasped him in his arms, and strained him passionately to his bosom, murmuring, "Marcus! Marcus! my son! my son!"

The young man was affected. His own heart was well-nigh broken with grief, and it could no longer resist the grief of another—his love, and his misery. He returned the old man's embrace, then replaced him tenderly in his chair—for he

seemed quite overpowered with emotion —and drawing another, sat down opposite to him, and took his hand.

Marcus did not speak first; indeed, he knew not well how to begin. He could not bear to reproach Mr. Sullivan, after the proofs of affection and contrition which he had just witnessed; and what but reproaches rose to his lips? His own heart was, as I said, well-nigh broken; he could neither disguise the misery which had been brought upon him, nor make any attempt at consolation; he wanted too much to be consoled himself.

So it was the priest, who in a troubled voice began to speak first—No proud priest was he now, but a tender-hearted, amiable, well-meaning man, perverted by false ideas of religion, and casuistical views in morals. He was no proud, artful tyrant of the soul, using the spiritual dominion he assumed for the worst purposes; as too many, I fear, have abused the awful power over consciences, which the Roman Catholic church delegates.—Poor Mr. Sullivan was no criminal of this kind.

Great temptations, doubtless, he had

met with in his vocation, — awful temptation to pervert right and do wrong; but the softness of his heart had tempered these evils. There had been no haughtiness or severity in him — none of that proud indifference to the sufferings of others, which men of his calling have too often allowed in themselves when intent upon some important end.

His heart was now bleeding within him at the misery he witnessed; and the more because this misery was chiefly of his own creating. He had intended well: it is true he had no selfish aims in view; but in the pursuit of the object he thought so desirable, he had done heavily wrong. He had tampered with truth; he had dared to disguise facts, and he had involved them all in one great deception.

There are few injuries, I feel persuaded, that can equal those inflicted by deception. Few things contribute so much to the harmony of human life as just perceptions of truth. It is like walking in the noonday, where everyone sees, understands, and can guide his own course with a just reference to that of his neigh-

bour; instead of running counter, jostling, irritating, and injuring, as one blindly stumbling in the twilight. And he, indeed, assumes a heavy responsibility, who dares to obscure the bright sunbeam of truth, and substitute his own imperfect guidance for that light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." If he do it with a good intention, he is fearfully rash and arrogant; if with a bad one, he is the child of the Evil One in person.

And this is the heavy error that church, of which Mr. Sullivan was a member, commits;—perhaps the most injurious of the many corruptions, errors, and mistakes into which she has fallen—that she dares, so lightly as she does, to tamper with the sacredness of truth—be it the truth of words, or be it the truth of deeds. Doing evil that good may come. The worst and most dangerous principle by which humanity can be governed.

We have seen how the conscience of Mr. Sullivan had been awakened, and the sufferings he had in consequence endured;

but these were light in comparison to what he now felt—to the pangs which rent his poor heart, as he sat there with the hand of Marcus in his own, and gazed upon the worn and faded countenance of the young man. At last he broke silence, and it was to say, anxiously,

"Lord Lisburn—looks—very far from—well."

"Yes—I am not well—I have, indeed, been very ill."

Silence. Then the priest, in still lower, humbler accents, began again:

"Lord Lisburn—has suffered?"

"Much.—But, why Lord Lisburn me? I was never Lord Lisburn to you before, Mr. Sullivan."

The priest looked him in the face for a moment so tenderly—so wistfully; then he said, in a low, husky voice, "I feared our relations had changed."

"There was cause," was the brief and pregnant reply.

"I know that; I own that," said the priest with much emotion. "I know, as man to man—yes, confronted here as man to man—but—yet . . . "

"And how else but as man to man, must we—ought we—can we meet? Mr. Sullivan, it is as if a veil had been removed from my eyes. I have thought much since we parted. I now see—or think I see—the mischief of all this. You are an honest man at heart, Mr. Sullivan. Had we never stood in any other relation but that of one weak, erring creature to another, this misery—this inconceivable misery—could never have been — Your heart is too good . . ."

Mr. Sullivan looked bewildered. Marcus was so much changed that he scarcely knew him again. The wild, high-spirited, thoughtless young fellow, had been suddenly matured by misery.

His spiritual guide had been completely deceived as to the character upon whose destiny he had assumed the right to decide. He was neither aware of its strength nor of its sensibility. He, like the world in general, had been deceived by Marcus's gay spirits and heedless impetuosity; justice had never been done either to the persistence or the fervour of his temper.

"I little thought—I little guessed—I little knew . . . "

"What I was capable of suffering—or how I was capable of loving—and that it is. Because you did not, and could not know—Because it was not given to you—it is given to no man—to be a reader of hearts—therefore was it so culpable in one man, to take upon himself to rule the fate of another — and by illegitimate means, too! But I do not wish to reproach you."

"No," said the priest sadly; "that I see you do not. — You are become *gentle* through suffering. You have abstained from all invective.—Yet, well I know that your curses are falling on me inwardly. Oh, Marcus!—Oh my son!" And he looked in his face imploringly.

"Not on you, but on your principles," was the reply.

The priest sighed and looked down.

"Yes," Marcus went on, recovering something of his old fire and vehemence; "yes, Mr. Sullivan, your principles—*all* your principles—I discover their hollowness at last—I see the false foundation upon which they are based, and I abjure

them—utterly and for ever abjure them all!"

"You will not turn Protestant?" exclaimed the priest, with a cry of great distress.

The young man sneered.

"Protestant!" he said; "A likely story!"

Mr. Sullivan looked relieved from his sudden paroxysm of distress; and his countenance settling into more composure, he said,

"I thought—at least I ought to have thought this—I ought to have known you better, Marcus—I ought to have known *that* was impossible for one like you."

"You were right there, Mr. Sullivan—that *would* be impossible for one like me, as you say—but I know not whether it will be the better for me."

"How the better?"

"Outwardly to profess, and inwardly to deny, is no very happy state of mind, is it?"

"What are you saying?—What can you mean?"

"I only take a leaf out of your book, Mr. Sullivan."

"I thought you had found the perusal

too painful," observed the priest with a sigh.

"Oh, painful enough! Painful enough! until a man is used to it—but having begun the reading, one must perforce go on; and, once started upon our path in life, vain is the attempt to alter it. I was born a member of a persecuted church, and a member of that church I intend to remain. Honour—every principle of my nature commands it.—Will *I* be part and parcel in Protestant ascendancy? No."

"Ah! there spoke Marcus—There spoke Lord Lisburn—There spoke my son."

"You would not be so well pleased, perhaps, Mr. Sullivan," continued the young man, and his countenance darkened as he went on, "if you knew the contempt for both churches which lies hidden under the sentiment I have just expressed. It is because I believe there is truth in neither, that I am thus indifferent as to my adherence to one. I have found nothing but falsehood with you; falsehood in civil, as well as in religious life.—In the one the greatest imposture, in the other the greatest deceit. It is because I have been

trained to think, that in this church,—this church of lies—this refuge of lies—the truth, if truth there be, alone abides—because I have been taught that all the professors of other religions are mere hypocrites and infidels, (and I believe it—for their quarrels, their mutual recriminations, and, above all, their selfishness and their pride, justify your accusations)—it is because of all this that it has become easy for me to adopt the principle I *have* adopted, and which you will find I shall adhere to. Externally, I will be the supporter,—and, if need be, the champion of my ancient, oppressed, national church; internally, I will none of her—I cast off her tyranny, and despise her seeming. I want neither guidance nor recompense from *her*.—I tell you I, henceforth and for ever, abjure it all. Free!—Free as the winds!—You have lost your neophyte, Mr. Sullivan. From this day to the day of my death I enter the confessional no more."

The priest cast down his eyes, but uttered not a word. What was it that was passing within him. What terrible

change was it that was coming over him? Was he, too, feeling the foundation of his faith shaking, rocking beneath his feet? Was he, too, beginning to discover the hollowness and the worthlessness of that upon which he had so long leaned,—which he had acquired the *habit* of regarding as the sole and sacred refuge of men? And, had he arrived at the same awful point. Alas! when the foundation of lies was swept away, must all the truths with which it was intermingled perish with it? Stood he, too, on the threshold of that abomination of desolations, outward profession and hidden infidelity.

Unhappy man! Was he henceforward to be not only like the illfated Marcus, deprived of all the consolations of his church, of all the supports of religion, but was he to be that wretchedest of wretched things, a minister of religion, without faith in religion — an infidel priest of the Most High God,—a martyr without conviction! A daily, hourly, momently lie—his life one tissue of hypocritical pretence,—handling sacred things, insisting upon sacred principles, exhorting

to a religious course—and every false look, and false word, and false gesture, and false pretence—only adding strength to the gnawing infidelity which was eating away his heart.

Most miserable man !

He could not endure the prospect, revealed, as it were by a sudden flash of light, to his soul. The hideous, hideous desolation for him and the son of love—the depths which that sudden flash betrayed ! He was forced, in his own despite, to drop the conversation—to change the current of thought, no matter how ; so he said,

"I fear by your face, that the expedition you undertook, and which was the cause of so much anxiety and distress to all, proved fruitless ?"

"Yes. She was married the day after I reached the spot.—It was thought she would have expired at the altar.—I was sensible long enough to see her fall down upon its steps in a death-swoon, to be picked up by that *other*. I saw no more —I believe I tumbled down senseless too. But we neither of us died. It takes much

to kill one. I got away as soon as I found that she was *likely to do well*"—with bitterness—"and I got on a stage or two. Then I fell ill; I believe of a brain fever, for there is a blank. It was March when I had left off remembering, and June, I believe, when I began to remember again. I have been ill, but luckily it was at one of their capital English north road inns. They took good care of me. They found out, by the money and papers I had, that I was to be trusted—so they took good care of me. But my mother would have made a fine to-do if she had known how I was going on."

"Lady Fermanagh has indeed suffered very much during your absence."

"Poor mother!—and my father? How did he take it?"

"He would not suffer any one to express an apprehension, or utter a word of blame.—He seemed to think the proceeding was natural and right—But you will find him a good deal altered."

"My honoured father! He became aware of the true state of the case?"

"I could conceal nothing from him."

"I thank you, Mr. Sullivan.—He thought my proceeding natural and right, did you say?"

"Yes—for he thought—he understood that you believed him to be privy to—to be—in the—in the—plan adopted—" added Mr. Sullivan, colouring and looking down.

"And therefore he thought my indignation just, and my conduct natural?"

"Yes."

"That is like my father?" and a glow of pleasure, it was the first for many a long day, which had warmed the heart of Marcus, diffused itself over his countenance. "But stop, stay!" he went on vehemently; "You said—I think I heard you say—imply—that my father—my dear, dear father, was not privy to the deceit—the—the—*plan* as you call it—adopted."

"He was not; I am bound to acknowledge that he was not," uttered Mr. Sullivan, without lifting up his eyes.

"Oh, priest, priest! And would you have divided father and son?"

CHAPTER VIII.

His eye is pregnant with anxiety.
The while . . . .
He there stands fixed from hour to hour.

WORDSWORTH.

It will easily be supposed that the alienation, regarded with such horror by Marcus, was not one among the evil results consequent upon Mr. Sullivan's mistaken conduct. It made no severance between father and son. Nay, the contrary. The father and the son became more united than ever, and, by the closest bonds of confidence and sympathy.

To sympathy of character was now added sympathy of opinion. The son had become what the father had long in secret been. Lord Fermanagh had, from a sad experience of the dreary vacuity of his own

opinions, desired a happier fate for Marcus—deeming it better to be the slave of a degrading superstition, rather than such as he himself was.

It is one lamentable result of the corruptions into which the Roman Church has fallen, that the retreat from it appears only to be into infidelity. We hear of very few converts from thence to other forms of Christianity. But I fear that, both among clergy and laity, secret infidelity exists to a dreadful degree, at least, among the more intelligent and thinking part of the community. This concealed canker is, indeed, a dreadful thing; and its existence is a matter which ought diligently to be inquired into, both by those who have embraced, and those who incline to embrace the Roman doctrines. Many of them actually persuaded into the fatal mistake, by that very form of faithful adherence which conceals such a hideous emptiness beneath it.

To see his son emancipated, as he had himself been, from all blind submission to priests, or adherence to their vain superstitions, gave a sensation of wintry

satisfaction to Lord Fermanagh. He felt as if it were in some measure to assume the manly robe—to evince the strength and ripeness of the reason and understanding. Yet he sighed, as other parents have sighed, when breaking down the barriers of domestic dicipline, the youth, a youth no longer, rushes forth alone to the battle of life. Sighed, ah! far more bitterly! For, to the man without religion, what is life? A puerile, futile, vain, aimless, but most often painful struggle, after mere fretting, passing shadows,—circles impressed upon the waters,—characters written upon the strand,—

> ——"A tale,
> Told by an idiot! full of sound and fury,
> Signifying—nothing."

So thought and felt, at this juncture, this eminent man. Man—I should rather say formed for eminence—but sentenced, through the religion he professed—the political principles he espoused—his own enthusiastic devotion to a principle of honour, and, as he thought, the best interests of his race, to pass away his life

in an obscure corner of his interesting, but misguided country, a useless and a ruined man—A man whose ruin was embittered by the sense that the efforts which had cost so much were vain, and worse than vain. His a long martyrdom of inefficiency.

Thenceforward the father and the son became all in all to each other. Yet little change appeared in their external relations; and poor Lady Fermanagh's conscience was left undisturbed. Of what she would have suffered, could she have had the slighest conception of the fatal truth, father and son were both too well aware, not to make the greatest sacrifices to preserve their secret. Inconsistency in such matters with the infidel is easy, and ceases to appear to him a crime.

The principle that it is right to observe the decencies of external religion for the sake of society in general, is one soon learned and readily acquiesced in. So that tenderness for Lady Fermanagh, and a something between tenderness and respect still felt by both for Mr. Sullivan, and a sense of the irreparable disgrace which

would fall upon their priest, should the true position of affairs in the family he directed become known, made them doubly cautious.

They both, therefore, regularly attended mass, and punctually went through the external forms of their religion, so far at least as was necessary to escape suspicion.

Mr. Sullivan, no longer his director, would cease, it may be perhaps imagined, to be Lord Lisburn's intimate friend. Far from it. The contrary effect took place. They understood each other now better than ever. Mr. Sullivan acquiesced in that secret liberation from all the restraints of the church which Marcus had asserted.—Secretly sighing, as he did so, for the same emancipation as regarded himself.

The contrition the priest had shown, the deep shame for his error, the intense affection and devotion to himself which he had displayed, had atoned to the generous heart of Marcus for all that had passed, and won the like forgiveness from his

father. Mr. Sullivan was soon more beloved and confided in than ever.

This was a consolation, a very great consolation to them all in their fearful state of moral destitution. To lean thus upon each other was a support and encouragement. They had all three feeling hearts and inquiring minds, and in their spiritual orphanage they wanted consolation very much.

There was one other subject upon which they also sympathised entirely, — the wrongs of their country, and the oppressions at that time exercised upon the professors of what I can hardly longer call religion; the fiscal injustice and the religious disabilities, they looked upon as but portions of one great injury.

These things at that period cut deeply into the hearts of the Irish Catholics; heavy were the oppressions, and cruel the wrongs under which they laboured. Thank God! things wear a different aspect now, and the wrongs and oppressions have pretty much changed sides; but we cannot wonder that the sense of past injury

is not yet altogether obliterated, — that the wounds it left behind are not yet quite healed, — that hearts are yet hesitating and suspicious upon both sides, where a controversy, so bitter, has been so long maintained. Let us remember these things and be patient, hopeful, and above all things candid and loving.

At the period of which I am writing, as regarded feelings the most intense, these topics prevailed almost universally; and in such these three most ardently participated. They were United Irishmen to the very core. Upon another subject remote from, but yet, owing to circumstances, intimately connected with such sentiments, they were less unanimous,— the subject of Miss Vernor. The father and the priest held together; the son was divided from them, and at war with himself.

He still loved Eleanor passionately. The conviction that she loved him—loved him intensely — even unto the death — even in the very moment when her hand was given—could not be effaced from his heart.

That countenance so full of woe which he had seen at the altar, even whilst she was sealing her infidelity to him! the impression was indelible. Those trembling hands — that faltering voice — that death-swoon when the sacrifice was completed—could he forget these?—Oh, no! There was that which gives to passion its indelible character, and colours the whole after life of the man.

His father and the priest in some degree understood the state of his mind, and watched him with the greatest concern. His father as a man of sense — the priest as a man of feeling. The one lamented that shipwreck of the man's life which such a state of the affections too often produces — the other mourned over the sufferings he witnessed. Both, also, deeply regretted the injury to their cause and party,—and the final ruin of the ancient and once powerful house, which a rupture of the engagements with Miss Vernor's family must occasion.

There was also upon Lord Fermanagh's part, many other causes of anxiety. He had a painful consciousness that Miss

Vernor had not been altogether well used. He feared that his son, smarting under the mortification incident to a disappointment such as his, had allowed himself to carry things farther in another direction than was altogether justifiable. The young lady in question was far from beautiful, and not particularly interesting; but that rendered it an additional injury to trifle with her. She might possess much more feeling than the world in general gave her credit for, and in fact certain ittle indications had not escaped Lord Fermanagh's attention, which he feared denoted more than they were taken for. There had been an increasing paleness in the cheek; an increasing nervousness in the manner; and, since the sudden disappearance of Marcus, such a real and serious illness, that though people talked of over-fatigue in a mountain excursion, imprudent chills and so on—he felt but too well assured that the secret of the poor young heiress was betrayed to him.

Poor young heiress!

How forcibly does Madame De Stael, contrast the advantages of nature against

those of fortune,—of health, beauty, and talents—against wealth, fine dressing, and "the best masters." Miss Vernor was heiress to a very large estate; that, poor thing was her allotted gift, and it was her only one. How many very great heiresses have shared in the same fate!

What can be the cause? Is it that through the very fact of their being great heiresses, they mostly represent a worn-out stock? Is it that the circumstances necessarily surrounding a child in that position are inimical to a just development? Is it from a sort of obscure law of compensations and abatements, which appears to regulate human affairs, that the gifts of nature and fortune are found so rarely to combine? It is useless here to inquire. All that is necessary for us to know is, that Miss Vernor was no exception to the ordinary rule.

The conduct which Marcus had pursued towards her had been capricious and uncertain. Deeply offended at what he thought Miss Wharncliff's unfeeling silence—faithfully believing all that Mr. Sullivan insinuated of supposed engage-

ments with others—influenced more than he would acknowledge, by those wishes which he knew to be so prevailing with the rest, Marcus had allowed himself in attentions which his father, in total ignorance of the real state of the case, had encouraged and seconded by every means in his power. The proceedings of the son had been vacillating and capricious; but those of the father most assiduous, and Lord Fermanagh was now but too conscious how far he had allowed himself to go in the full assurance that his son's heart was disengaged, and that sooner or later he would yield to reason and the general wish.

His intimate communications with the young lady had gone far to satisfy him that he had formed a just idea of the state of her affections, and he now recollected, with all the remorse of an honourable mind, little symptoms betraying the deep affection upon Lucy Vernor's part which he had encouraged by professions and assurances in the name of his son—a conduct he now bitterly regretted. It was, therefore, with the deepest anxiety

he watched the conduct, endeavoured to divine the real state of Lord Lisburn's affections, and to prognosticate the result.

Alas! he soon found but too much cause for new anxieties. The conduct of Marcus began to assume symptoms of wilfulness and eccentricity which had never been observed in him before. Fiery and intractable from a child he had been; but allowed a little time, the storm ever subsided, his better self recovered the mastery, and he became gentle and reasonable. But now there seemed to be a something — an inexplicable undefinable something—a difference from his former self—a cloud—a shadow cast over him which gave cause for the most serious uneasiness.

No longer fiery, passionate, hot, intractable, his too ardent temperament seemed to have subsided into something calmer, less imaginative, less ardent, and less easily excited; but with this change, which might by most have been called an improvement, there was a something united it was difficult exactly to understand. There was too *much* external

docility,—a tractableness unnatural to the character; and, as regarded things in general, the will seemed broken — the faculty of choice or preference gone. The young man was morbidly passive in the hands either of his father or of Mr. Sullivan. But there were occasions when the reverse took place, and in a degree perfectly unaccountable. Few such occasions were, but when they arose, the opposition took an obstinate, sullen character, quite foreign to his natural disposition.

At such times the father would sigh and look anxiously at the priest; and Mr. Sullivan would endeavour to console Lord Fermanagh and himself by attributing these changes of humour and little peculiarities of temper to the remains of the brain-fever which had shattered the constitution so much. Striving to persuade himself that with returning health they would gradually disappear.

It was upon the subject of Miss Vernor especially that these symptoms of slight mental aberration were chiefly apparent; for Marcus was, upon this subject, not

only divided from the others, but at war with himself.

In the midst of all his tender regrets, in spite of all his fond belief in the secret constancy of Eleanor Wharncliffe's affections, there were moments when he was a prey to a cruel sense of resentment, when his heart bitterly reproached her for her weakness, and his spirit called aloud for revenge. After all, she *had* forsaken him, and, passively or not, given herself to another. The feverish excitement of his nerves added force to the painful vacillation of his feelings.

As time passed away, and the sweet, pale image of the dying girl grew somewhat fainter, that of the scene in the wood,—when she had suffered herself to be torn, as it were, from his arms,—seemed to become unnaturally vivid; and he dwelt with increasing irritation upon her passive submission to the will of others.

His mind was unsteady, it was evident. At times, he seemed aware of, and to struggle against, the intensity of some ideas and recollections; at others, he would

yield to them, without the least attempt at self-control. And among those feelings, which came and went with the most unnatural rapidity, was the wish, at times imperceptible, at others wild and vehement, of being revenged upon Eleanor's infidelity.

It was at such moments that his thoughts would turn to Miss Vernor, —partly in resentment against Eleanor, partly in gratitude for her partiality and constancy; and he felt ready to be and to do everything that his father could desire.

In the present state of his feelings, the very fact of her want of beauty, grace, and exterior charms, actually militated in the young heiress's favour. There was nothing to excite feelings adverse to the indulgence of his passion for Eleanor Wharncliffe. Had Miss Vernor been as lovely, she might have contested the place in his heart as a rival; there might have been a struggle within that inner sanctuary where all he held dear upon earth was enshrined. But, as it was, there was no division of that sort;—Miss Vernor held

but the outer court of the temple. She was a being to be married for the sake of his family and his country—to be treated with tenderness and respect upon account of her many virtues; but nothing more—Not to be loved—not to profane his heart with love—Oh, not that!

In this manner the affair went on; and the poor young lady, who loved but too sincerely herself, was content to receive this defaced and mutilated affection. The acquaintance between the families was now renewed with increased vigour; and, in spite of the disordered state of Marcus's spirits, the affair advanced.

The severe illness Marcus had gone through was sufficient to account for the haggard looks, varying spirits, and uncertain proceedings of the lover; and Miss Vernor was but too happy to accept the apology. Glad to be persuaded, the interest she took in him was only the more increased by these starts of kindness and these alternations of sullen reserve. The fathers upon each side suffered themselves to be satisfied with the state of things. Mr. Vernor was not a man of much ob-

servation, and the poor young heiress had lost her mother; as for Lord Fermanagh, he was too deeply anxious that his son should retrieve his honour by proposals of marriage not to be glad to cheat himself with hope.

CHAPTER IX.

> I am the wave of life,
> Stained with my margin's dust:
> From the struggle and the strife
> Of the narrow stream I fly
> To the sea's immensity.
>
> LONGFELLOW, *from Tiedge.*

WHILST such was the state of things in Ireland, how went it in England?

The contrast was great.

The gentle influence which the unfortunate Marcus had forfeited was producing the most benign effects upon his rival. The peaceful happiness I have attempted to describe a few pages back, continued to increase every day. Each day Eleanor loved Randal better, and each day Randal became more worthy to be loved.

"I do not know how it is with me," he one day noted down in his memorandum-book; "I feel no longer as if I were the

same man. My mind, which used to be like a gloomy cavern, peopled with dark images, is now all light. Things, and, above all, people, that used to irritate me beyond endurance seem to have lost this power. From the brute that I was, I am becoming a humanised man. And as for happiness—which I never enjoyed I verily believe in my life, but when I held her, then a little creature, by the hand,—oh, as for happiness! . . . . Thank God for it! I had not even believed in the existence of such happiness."

And what was Marcus at that very moment saying to Mr. Sullivan?

"It is vain to remonstrate; I am resolved—and not all the reasoning in the world shall persuade me from my purpose. I tell you, disguise it as I may, I am miserable — utterly, insupportably miserable. Whichever way I turn it is misery; whichever way I think it is misery; whichever way I feel—oh!"—turning fiercely to the priest—"I know now what you meant when you used to talk to me of Hell.

"Still," after a pause he ran on, "I feel the truth of what my father urges. I have

committed myself and him; and this young creature, poor, poor fool! has attached herself to a ruin—a wretch—a monster like me. I know, or believe I know—for my head is all confusion—what honour demands, what truth demands. I intend—I hope—I shall be able to fulfil these demands—but I may any day put a pistol to my head, as the preferable alternative. For I know nothing, and can promise nothing. Upon one thing alone, come what will of it, I am resolved.

"You may spare me all argument, or remonstrance; for I tell you it is all in vain. Nay, I would beg you to spare me this; for were not my purpose as immovable as that rock there, which has braved the waves of the Atlantic for ages, contradiction would make it so. Yes, Mr. Sullivan, I know not how it is with me—I tell you—I have long warned you of it. Prayers and remonstrances are alike in vain with me. Instead of inclining me to hesitate—to consider—to pause—they seem only to impel me forward in my own course, with a sort of unnatural pertinacity."

"But conduct so rash! So imprudent, so futile, so wrong!"

"It may be all that—nay, I know that it is all that, and more; and yet do it I will—do it I must; some demon, some angel, rather, forces me on. Yes, I will see her again. Yes, my Eleanor, I will see thee again! My brain reels. I doubt of all; I doubt my own existence; I doubt even her reality—the reality of all that has passed—even, the astounding truth that she is alive, and another's.

"But," turning to the priest, and his countenance relaxing from its wild distraction, "one thing, Mr. Sullivan, I do feel assured of, that once having seen her again, I shall be better—Indeed I shall be better—I shall know then what I can do and what I cannot do—I shall be at one again with myself, perhaps. Oh! perhaps, to see her another's," and the tears sprang to his eyes, "may heal, may soothe, may quench this ever-burning fire—may kill this never-dying worm—may assuage the horror of these restless, ever-restless thoughts.

"But, whether or not, so it shall be.

Tell my father and mother that I am gone, for I wish to spare myself and them all painful remonstrances."

Randal might, indeed, esteem himself blest. The prime blessing of domestic life was about to crown his hopes—The ineffable and sacred joy about to be realized of seeing himself and the being he adored, united and repeated in a new being.

Eleanor was expecting her confinement in a few days. The cares he had lavished upon her, the tenderness with which he had anticipated the coming blessing, the excessive feeling which he had displayed upon the subject, had interested and astonished himself and every one.

Was this Randal?

As to Eleanor, the prospect before her was inexpressibly dear. In spite of her every-day increasing attachment to her husband, and her submission to the inevitable, and her grateful acceptance of every good presented, there was still a void, a something left unsatisfied within.

This new existence was to complete all.

It was a lovely summer evening, and

she and Randal had been dawdling arm-in-arm along the gravel walk overhanging the cliff, which Eleanor no longer felt inclined to descend.

One of those soft mild tranquil evenings it was, when all nature seems to breathe the very spirit of peace, and the human heart to swell with a sort of tender tremulous joy. The sun tinted the crags, and the lovely hanging underwood with which they were clothed, and gleamed bright upon the hurrying stream below. Then he began slowly to set behind the far hills; and upon the opposite side of the horizon, over a noble wood at the back of the house, the round full moon was rising.

The heart of Randal Langford was almost oppressed with the sense of ineffable peace and happiness. He felt, as we have all done at times, as if there was scarcely room within his bosom for it,—as if his heart was scarcely big enough to contain it. They were both silent, but the arm that rested upon his was strained close to his heart. She felt the pressure and understood it.

"What a lovely evening it is," she at

last said, looking up, " and that sky is perfectly glorious—Let us turn round the tower and go under the Raven's Oak. I should like to see the effect of that crimson sky from under the branches."

They strolled that way, and they soon stood under the shadow of the old great tree. The ravens were flying round and round it with a hoarse ominous sort of croak. The shadows were falling fast, and that of the lofty tower was cast by the rising moon across it. The aspect of the place was spectral and gloomy.

" Let us go into the house," said the husband; " this oak looks to me, to-night, someway more dismal and lugubrious than usual. It does not harmonise at all with my present feelings, I can tell you, my sweetest of all Eleanors—and what an odious croak those birds keep up.—No! no!" attempting to scare them away.

" Don't disturb them, Randal; I rather like it. This scene which looks so lugubrious to you, is soothing and pleasant to me. I feel rather tired; let me sit down upon the turf-seat, and I should so like —perhaps, you know, I may not be out

of doors again for a long time—every hour may be my last," she said, laughing in her gentle way; "and this evening is so perfectly delicious, so soft and warm, and so peculiarly tender and still,—I should so like—Will you do me a little favour, Randal?"

"You a favour! Oh, no, pleasure in doing all things—everything—in only living and breathing to serve and please you," he said passionately.

She took up his hand which held hers, and kissed it; and then she said,—

"If your mother would not think it a most outrageous breach of all proprieties, I should so like to sit down here, and you to fetch me a cup of tea,—for tea must be ready by this time—and I know if I once go in I shall be too idle to come out again."

She rather wished to be alone for a little while; I believe she wanted to say her prayers.

She was, we all know, a timid creature, the struggle in prospect terrified her a good deal. At times, those old feelings about her heart made her doubt her being

equal to it. And she had a nervous dread of death. At such times she had recourse to prayer. She felt rather oppressed by her little weaknesses now; the tender loveliness of this sweet evening seemed rather to have saddened than cheered her. It was such a sweet and lovely world to leave,—if she should be called upon so soon to leave it.

He placed her upon the turf seat under the tree. The moon glistened under and between the branches as they waved up and down, chequering the grass with glancing lights and shadows. There Randal left her, and departed for the house to look after his mother and get his darling some tea.

She sat there, lifting up her eyes to the glorious expanse above her head, through which the large full moon was slowly ascending, not engaged in what might exactly be called prayer,—but her swelling heart filled with a sense of the Infinite, and of the awful and everlasting presence.

Suddenly she heard something move among the branches of a shrubbery at no great distance. She looked round a

little startled. All was still, and again she composed her thoughts to meditation. The branches move again,—they seem strangely agitated,—her heart begins to beat,—she rises from her seat,—but, before she has time to move from her place the boughs burst asunder—there is a sudden crash,—and a man rushes forward—dashes himself at her feet—and clasps his arms round her.

The first emotion was one of agonizing terror, under which she could not even utter a cry,—the next—

Oh! the next!

It sent the blood in torrents to her heart,—to her brain. Her head reeled—her eyes grew dim—her breath failed her. She sank down almost senseless, and he caught her as she fell.

Unable to utter a cry,—almost incapable of motion as she now was,—she was not utterly insensible. She knew who was near her,—who supporting her. She tried to struggle to get free. But he endeavoured to raise her up, and replace her upon the seat, whispering,—

"Eleanor! Eleanor! It is I.—My own,

my Eleanor! recollect yourself.—It is Marcus,—it is I."

She revived at the words, but it was to push him with what little force she had away, faintly uttering,—

"Oh, Marcus! Marcus! I could not have believed it of you! How wrong! How very, very wrong!"

"I know—I know—Wrong! Wrong! Yes, wickedly wrong! Damnably wrong!—But I see you again, I hear your voice, oh! Eleanor, Eleanor! and now let me die."

"Die, Marcus! Oh, don't, don't die;" was uttered in the softest and tenderest voice, all trembling with emotion. "Don't, dear Marcus—Be resigned, be comforted. It was the will of Heaven to part us. I have struggled—I have——"

"Struggled. Aye, aye; say that again—say that again. That does me good—struggled—Yes, my love—still my love—"

But a violent blow levelled him to the ground as he spoke.

She fell as he fell.

There she lay—but he started up like a fury, and rushed upon his antagonist.

It was a death-contest that ensued.

The two men fell upon each other. They were no longer men, they were lions; fierce wild beasts, mad with rage. Neither of them heeded the poor creature, as she lay upon the ground; first feebly imploring, then calling upon them louder and louder, till her entreaties ended in piercing shrieks.

They heeded her not—they heard nothing—they felt nothing but the fury of their undying hatred. They tore at each other; they sprung at each other; it was no regular fight—it was the passionate rage of frenzy. Rage!—Their hair stood erect, their eyes flashed fire, their teeth gnashed,—they gasped for breath.

Now they paused for a second, and eyed each other,—oh, with such a look!—and then dashed to the combat again.

And the poor creature lay there, shriek succeeding to shriek in vain.

How long the death-struggle would have lasted I know not, or how ended, had not the shrieks of Eleanor reached the house, and alarmed Mrs. Langford, who heard her fearful cries through the open window, as she sat making tea in the drawing-

room. She was frightened out of her usual composure, and hurrying out of the room, made the best of her way towards the spot. The men-servants, alarmed also, (for the cries had reached their side of the house,) were hastening by this time to the place, and their voices were heard approaching, mingled with the cries and exclamations of women. Marcus threw his head suddenly back, and cast a hurried glance around; then, turning to his adversary, aimed, with his clenched fist, a blow full in his eyes, and then, like a discomfited lion, suddenly turned away, sprung into the next thicket, and disappeared.

They lifted the shrieking sufferer from the ground, whilst her husband, half-blinded with the blow, and almost mad with rage, stood there regardless; but when the servants had lifted Eleanor up, he seemed to recollect himself, and coming forward, roughly interfered.

"Give her to me," he cried, and caught her rudely in his arms. And then, he turned away and hurried towards the house, with the air rather of one carrying some senseless burden than a living being.

Now and then he looked down upon the agonised face that was lifted up to his in speechless terror and entreaty, but only to meet it with a scowl of hatred and defiance. Now and then he raised his eyes to the heavens, as if he were invoking curses upon her and upon himself.

He hurried on, carrying her in this manner towards her bedroom, followed by his mother, who could do nothing but exclaim and remonstrate.

"Gently, Randal!—gently! Take care! you don't know—she is very ill; you will kill her!" And then there is another agonising shriek, and she writhing in his arms.

But he held her fast, and sternly pursued his way.

"Gently, my dear Randal! You don't know—poor thing!"

He flung rather than laid her upon the bed; but she was now in a state to defy the kindness or the unkindness of man. She was in the death-struggle between weakness and torture, when the agony of the torment absorbs and almost annihilates the soul.

He stood there at the foot of the bed, as he had once stood before; but oh! in how different a mood. He stood there unpitying and unrelenting.

His mother looked at him with astonishment: looked at his bruised and disfigured face,—his torn, dishevelled dress and hair, —his hard, cruel, fixed eye. The distress of the moment was great; and yet in her womanly feeling for the poor agonised one before her, she could not help casting astonished glances at her son.

Help had been sent for,—the country was being scoured round for help,—to what avail?

Shriek succeeded to shriek; first louder and louder—piercing and more piercing; then fainter and fainter, as if the vital strength was fast giving way.

Suddenly Eleanor lifted herself up, extended her arms, cast an imploring, agonising, look of affection and entreaty at her husband—met his—uttered a loud wildering shriek!

Her spirit flew to God, and Randal Langford was a father.

CHAPTER XI.

Oh, child! oh, new-born denizen
Of life's great city! . . . .
Here at the portal dost thou stand,
And with thy little hand
Thou openest the mysterious gate.

LONGFELLOW.

THE little gurgling cry of a new-born infant was heard,—it was the only sound from the bed. The mother looked up pale with terror at her son.

"Is she dead?"

Long was Mrs. Langford employed endeavouring to revive animation.—She did not speak, but she looked up at him once more.

"Is Eleanor Wharncliffe dead?" he said.

The mother shook her head, but still answered not.

"Is she dead?" he shouted, — "Is Eleanor Wharncliffe dead — dead — dead —dead?"

Then desperately he pushed his mother from before the bed,—and wildly shrieking, flung himself upon the body,—as wildly he kissed the pallid lips, again, and again, and again;—then as if suddenly sickened with horror at some sudden recollection, almost as passionately he spurned the senseless form away, and starting up from the bed, hurried out of the room, entered his own, locked the door, threw himself upon a sofa face downwards,—and there he lay for eight-and-forty hours.

This it is to be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Hideous and utter darkness, where the true light of our existence shineth not; and the soul, shut out from the presence of her Creator, is abandoned,—poor weak and blind pilgrim,—to the course of circumstances, and to the force of evil influences from without and from within.

Strange mystery! Mystery upon which

the mind perpetually ponders, seeking but never finding satisfaction. *The mystery of iniquity*, inscrutable and terrible.

One thing only seems certain; that, without God, without that faith which accepts the truth and realises the existence of a living governing God,—Father, and Saviour, and Holy Spirit, — Man is a mutilated imperfect miserable being, Life a wretched abortion, and the course of Time, instead of bringing forth in its progress first the leaf, then the blossom, then the ripened and perfected seed, — if the metaphor may be pursued,—for the want of that light, that sun, that Sun of righteousness, rising upon the earth with healing in his wings,—bears at the best but a blighted and imperfect flower, which blows for a season and then withers away —"and the seed is not in it."

Randal Langford rose from that couch of anguish, upon which he had laid for eight-and-forty hours, a changed, but alas! not a regenerated man. The state of his feelings had been almost too awful to describe. Rent in pieces by all the fiercest agonies of love, jealousy, rage,

despair, and, above all, by that cruellest, cruellest of all, regret for her who was lost to him for ever.—Yes, she whom he had loved so passionately,—still, still loved in spite of all this frenzy of rage—yes, she was dead—gone, and never, never, in this world should he look upon her more,—never—never.

But there is something so holy and sacred in the idea of death—of the death of the innocent and good—that this thought, cruel as it was, brought the tears to his burning eyes. But they were dashed violently away again, as the thought, the racking thought recurred, that she he loved was *not* innocent and good—that her heart had been dissembling and false, all her tenderness but seeming—and that during the very time of his intensest felicity her secret affection had been another's!

And that other! Who? What was he? Alas! his bitterest, most detested enemy!

That was the pang that poisoned.

It was upon the evening of the second

day that Randal Langford, having impatiently repulsed every attempt at consolation, and angrily rejected every offer of refreshment or food, rose from this morbid trance of passion, stood erect, and looked round him.

The evening was shutting in, and his solitary room overshadowed. The remoter corners were already hidden in darkness, and creeping spectral forms seemed to surround him, as there he stood in utter solitude and desolation of heart, like one who remains living surrounded by a dreary waste, over which the hurricane or the earthquake has passed—alone amid a heap of ruins. One vast ruin lay round him,—ruin in its most hideous shape, for not alone had all which gives value to life been destroyed, but the most hideous confusion had succeeded.

Eleanor had loved another, and that other was Marcus Fitzroy.

She was false, false, false! False, and worse! Full of fair deceitful seeming! For had she not seemed to love him? Had she not seemed to be satisfied and happy? Had she not seemed? Had . . . Oh!

misery of miseries! when all the treasure of life is found a lie!

And yet no sooner was the death-agony so far passed that he could stand upright, than his first resolve was to see her again,—to visit the senseless remains of her once so passionately adored. He went to his chimney-piece, upon which stood candlesticks, struck a light, and walked straight to the room where she lay.

The door was unfastened; he opened it and went in. Two women servants were sitting together by the window, watching in the chamber of the dead. The window was open, and the evening air came in, swaying the blind up and down gently, every now and then affording a glimpse of the beautiful world without, and admitting still evening sounds from distant man or animal. It seemed as if even Nature herself was hushed into a kind of melancholy lull. And awful was the stillness which pervaded the chamber. The two women servants turned their heads hastily as the door opened, and started as the tall dark figure of their young master presented

itself! He made a hasty impatient sign for them to go away, and they rose in silence and immediately quitted the room, closing the door after them.

Then he turned to the bed, upon which the marble image of all that he had ever loved was lying; and he lifted up the cambric handkerchief which covered the face, and gazed upon the motionless beauty of the waxen features—Slumbering so still!

He was in the room a long time. When he left it, the wedding-ring was no longer to be seen upon the cold finger where he had placed it under circumstances nearly as appalling.

That night his mother came to him, bringing a cup of tea in her hand. She found him sitting by his window, which was not, however, open; he was leaning his forehead against the panes. She went up to him, and spoke in a softened voice. All that was woman within her had indeed been awakened by the lamentable events of the last few days. Her grief and her

pity were heartfelt and deep. She addressed her son in tones which he had never heard from her lips before, and entreated him to take some nourishment.

"Thank you, mother," he said, turning his head towards her; and he took up the cup and emptied it at one draught. This seemed to refresh him, and from that time he resumed the habits of ordinary life. He suffered his mother to sit by him for some time in silence, and afterwards, at her earnest persuasion, promised to undress and go to bed. The next day he came down to breakfast as usual, where he merely exchanged a pressure of the hand with his father, that being the only intimation of sympathy the old man could find power to give; for his heart was in truth well-nigh broken for his son.

Mr. Langford, senior, was far advanced in years now. Age had broken down the iron frame, and softened the iron temper. He was weakened in body and mind, and he was the tenderer and the kinder for it.

After breakfast was over, and the mother and son were left alone together,

Mrs. Langford ventured, in a low, hesitating manner, to allude to the baby.

"It may interest you,—it may perhaps comfort you to know that our poor, dear—our—has left a precious pledge behind her. The baby is living—It is a boy—"

He turned away from her, and stood without speaking, his back towards her, his face against the wall. After a little pause, she ventured to say,—

"Would you not like to see it?"

"No," he answered, and immediately left the room.

It was many weeks before Randal saw his child, and then only once and by accident.

He was returning home one afternoon by the walk along the river's side, when he overtook a woman who was walking slowly before him. As he passed he saw that she carried a sleeping infant in her arms. First he strode on with accelerated speed. Suddenly he stopped, hesitated—turned back. In a hurried manner he approached the nurse, and lifted up

the shawl which covered the child's face. There he beheld the sweetest of pictures. A most lovely baby, sleeping peacefully.

He stood and gazed.

At last he raised one tiny, delicate hand in his large dark fingers. He seemed strangely moved at the contrast. He stooped his tall form, and pressed the little helpless hand to his lips, and then he went away.

When this was related to Mrs. Langford, she hoped that he would take comfort henceforward in his child, notice it, and become attached to it. But it proved not so. Randal neither inquired after, nor attempted to see it again; though if by accident, as was sure to occur living in the same house, he met with it, he seemed to feel a tender emotion.

In general manner and conduct, as regarded everything else, he speedily relapsed into what he had been before his marriage. The only difference perceptible being in the increased gloom and moroseness which added a dark shade to his usual scornful indifference to people and things. There were likewise at times

paroxysms of intense, almost insupportable distress.

But Time, who pauses not either for sorrow or for joy, passed on, and gradually effaced and softened down the violence of suffering, until Randal Langford became apparently, in most respects, much like any other reserved and unamiable men.

The harsh features of his character certainly seemed to acquire additional strength day by day as he receded more and more from all intimate communion with mankind in general; and the sarcastic bitterness with which he spoke of his race, but more especially of woman, was increased —and yet, to the surprise of everybody in the county, Randal Langford, after the death of his father and mother, which followed not very long upon that of Eleanor, married again.

After this event, his life became still more and more retired. He shut himself up from all society, and like some feudal despot that one has read of in the olden days, ruled his possessions in a sort of gloomy dignity, surrounded by and hold-

ing communication with his dependents only—a solitary autocrat.

The evil influences of such a position upon such a character may be imagined.

As for Marcus, he returned to Ireland, in a state of mind which I shall not linger here to describe. He had learned the death of Eleanor before he quitted the country.

He also was a changed man. All the fiery spirit of his character seemed gone; he was passive, melancholy, and moping. From this state his father and Mr. Sullivan made every effort imaginable to arouse him, whilst his mother wept in perpetual and helpless lamentation. For some time both the efforts to rouse him upon the one side, and the lamentations over his fate upon the other seemed equally without effect.

But time produced its effects here, as well as elsewhere. By degrees the heavy gloom and depression changed into a more gentle melancholy. And, indeed, I believe that he found it, in a short time,

far more tolerable to think of Eleanor as dead than he had done as belonging to another.

This state of mind favoured Miss Vernor's interests. There was no one now left upon earth to contend with her. Many feelings took a different turn, and the very grief felt for the loss of Eleanor, when it was a little softened by time, inclined Lord Lisburn to seek consolation in the affection of another; whilst his romantic attachment to her memory led him to find a certain pleasure in that want of attraction which rendered all idea of rivalry ridiculous. He liked it better so, and he began to feel a certain consolation in the affection of the humble and gentle heiress. He began to look upon her no longer in the *odious* light of an heiress, but as a kind, tender woman and friend. He began to love her for herself, in a new and quite different way from that with which he had loved before; but his feelings were honest, amiable, and sincere.

Marcus did not marry as Randal had done,—in bitter scorn of himself and

womankind—merely to find a housekeeper for his family, and thus spare himself the plague and bother of conducting his own domestic concerns. He did not marry a *thing*, withholding altogether his heart. No; Marcus was of a more generous and loving temper, and for the woman he married he felt a tender esteem, though it could amount to nothing more. Nevertheless, Marcus, like Randal, remained what these events had left him, altogether an altered man.

The marriage with Miss Vernor took place about a year after Eleanor's death, and he continued quietly to reside with her in his father's castle, in the remote part of Ireland where it was situated, taking no part in the business or amusements of the great world. She lived with him some years, happy in his society, deserving and enjoying his respect and esteem, and the affection and esteem of all who knew her.

In due course of time Lord and Lady Fermanagh died, and Marcus succeeded to the title and estate, but he still continued to lead the life of seclusion which

seemed congenial to him, and in which he had persevered in spite of all the endeavours of Lord Fermanagh to induce him to the contrary,—perhaps he was right.

It seemed doubtful whether his mental health had ever entirely recovered the shocks it had received during the events which had taken place, and secluded as his life might appear to those around him, there was in it abundance of interest.

Marcus, like his father before him, felt intensely the wrongs and injuries under which his country at that period undoubtedly suffered, and sympathised almost passionately with the feelings of those who agonised in the attempt to relieve her; in all which sentiments Mr. Sullivan most assuredly took the warmest part. Such things prevented life, even in this remote corner of the kingdom, from becoming absolutely monotonous.

CHAPTER X.

To bend thy spirit down to his
Which is so much beneath
Thine own in power; why surely this
Is bitterer than death.
JOHN WILLIAM FLETCHER

"ALL the world 's a stage," says Shakspere, in the line which has become a popular proverb. And, certainly, whether all mankind be justly called comedians or no, the changes in the shifting scenes of the great theatre are as complete and as unexpected as upon the mimic boards.

Let any one return to some well-accustomed spot, after the absence of a few short years, and what a complete revolution will he find. Those are dead that he left in the full bloom and promise of life; those gray-haired whom he

quitted in the prime of manhood; those are thoughtful men who were left careless children; and some whose outer features may have as yet been little touched by the hand of time, display changes in their habits and characters less obvious but far more important.

More than twenty years have elapsed since we took leave of Randal Langford, and how shall we find him again?

Mr. and Mrs. Langford, as I have related, did not long survive the unfortunate Eleanor, and for many years Randal has now reigned the unquestioned master of this large fortune, and still larger domain. His widely-extended property, besides its numerous acres of valuable land, included miles and miles of bog and mountain moor; part quite inaccessible, incapable of receiving the slightest cultivation, part affording subsistence by its scanty returns, to a rude and lawless population. Their half-civilized habits of life were such as might be expected from the circumstances in which they lived, excluded by the remoteness of their situation from sharing in the general improvement

which was taking place around them. They were most of them poachers, many of them thieves; excessively irregular in payment of the trifling rents demanded for their holdings, and unscrupulous encroachers upon land not within their appointed limits.

Such a population, and such a species of property, is of a worrying and irritating description, and requires much judicious firmness and generous benevolence upon the part of the proprietor to administer it — as all property ought to be administered—for the ultimate benefit of every one belonging to it. Added to this, there was also a very extensive tenantry, composed chiefly of small farmers, without much capital, and whose returns and punctuality at rent-day were consequently dependent upon the seasons.

The government of the domain of Ravenscliffe was therefore no very easy matter. It required not only much attention and care, and a strict regard to justice, but a mild, consistent, and temperate rule. To those who so rule, such possessions afford perhaps the best discipline

the mind and disposition can receive; but to those who cannot, or who will not, thus comply with the indispensable demands of situation, it proves a perpetual source of discomfort and vexation. With some, a government in which so much exercise of authority is required, speedily degenerates into a tyranny; with others it is thrown up and neglected, as too troublesome and irritating to be attended to; with some few it is diligently and faithfully administered, to the glory of God and the benefit of man.

Under the soft influences of his first wife, at peace with himself, in spite of his little secret jealousies and anxieties, and domesticated with one, a pattern of faithful endeavour and tender sympathy, Randal Langford had performed his part upon the whole well.

The faults of his temper had insensibly been corrected by the daily influence which so sweetly acted upon them, till he had arrived at that great step in the moral progress of such a man's life,—the calling himself to account for harsh judgments, every injurious suspicion, or unkind word.

Constantly living in the familiar presence of one who was made up of pity, it was impossible for him to continue pitiless. The hourly witness of her humility as regarded herself, and candour with respect to others, that his pride, insolence, and contempt for his kind could not but be softened and rectified.

She taught him to regard the vicious irregularities of his dependents as the result rather of ignorance, and their half-savage life, than as the mark of inherent brutality. He could not witness her faithful search after the good which lies hidden in some corner or other even in the worst of characters, without himself learning to believe that there was more of it among mankind in general than he, in his pride, had been ready to acknowledge. In short, whilst Eleanor lived, Randal had been an altered man.

That brief influence withdrawn, that heavy loss sustained, and the agony of his desolation rendered inexpressibly more bitter by the circumstances under which it had taken place, the character of Randal had darkened again. His melancholy

sense of destitution; the revolt of his heart against what he considered the cruelty of the infliction he had sustained; above all, the intense feeling of hatred, bitterer than ever, which he cherished — cultivated, I might almost say, — against the man who had twice so cruelly injured him, contributed to this fearful result. Like steel, he seemed only the harder for having been tempered.

Most unfortunately, there was no one left who possessed the slightest power to win his confidence, or administer consolation. Randal had the misfortune to be a rare and exceptional character; his defects obvious, his good qualities great, as they unquestionably were, latent, and hidden even from himself. A certain grandeur of mind which he possessed, served only to render sympathy from his inferiors impossible—the exquisite and exaggerated sensibility of his heart, to make him appear among men but as a sort of monster of violence, to be dreaded and avoided. No one in communication with him was in the least able to comprehend such a being; they looked upon him with

a sort of stupid fear and dislike, which he returned with antipathy and scorn. His very parents scarcely formed an exception; they, even, had seemed to understand him little better than the rest of the world had.

In this state of mind, his grief, over an irreparable loss, was cherished by him as his sole and hidden treasure; and in a sort of gloomy pride and consciousness that the heart, capable of such never-dying regret, was not without its worth —lay corroding, that heart, in silence.

People in general thought Randal Langford bore his loss with mighty composure, and commented, after their own fashion, upon the marvellous coldness and indifference of a temper which gave not the slightest outward indication of its sufferings. Such things inevitably increase the disposition to cherish ill-will against mankind.

Men like Randal inevitably become morose and misanthropical under the process. More proud from the consciousness of hidden suffering; alienated from the universal brotherhood, by those very pangs

of nature which should make all mankind kin.

For a considerable time, in spite of the little demonstrations of tenderness into which he had been surprised, Randal seemed to regard his infant with a sort of bitter antipathy, as the cause of its mother's death. For some time he obstinately refused to allow it to be brought near where he was; and yet these feelings had their intermissions, there were moments of almost passionate doting. One day, in particular, when the child was about six weeks old, and its features had already begun to assume that striking likeness to the mother for which the boy was afterwards so remarkable, Randal was found standing alone in the nursery, his eyes intently fixed upon the sleeping infant, and his cheeks absolutely flooded over with tears. At the entrance of the nurse, who thus surprised him, he looked much displeased; hastily turned away without speaking, — and it was weeks before he looked upon the boy again.

Mr. and Mrs. Langford were now dead; and it had been during the course of the

ensuing year that Randal, finding himself alone, and sole master of Ravenscliffe, to the astonishment of all the world, married again. The object of his choice was as strange as the proceeding seemed to be,—it was neither more nor less than the niece of one of his own tenants.

The new Mrs. Langford was a respectable young woman enough in her way, and a dark, black-browed, handsome girl. But everybody was naturally both shocked and scandalised. The Wharncliffes, more especially, thought they had a right to feel very much hurt and offended at the successor that had been chosen for their poor Eleanor. Indeed, there was not a young lady within twenty miles around Ravenscliffe that did not feel more than half inclined to imagine herself slighted and ill-used.

He cared not in the least for all this clamour, and he showed that he did not. He appeared perfectly unconcerned, except that he was perhaps rather more exacting as regarded the conventional attentions and congratulations of his friends and acquaintance, than he would have been

had he contracted the most splendid alliance in the county. He gave it generally to be understood, through his steward, that he expected every family in the neighbourhood to call upon the present Mrs. Langford, and that he should feel deeply offended if she were not treated with precisely the same marks of respect as had been shown to his own mother. That she would endear herself to all hearts, as his first wife had done—that she should be dearly-beloved by all or any for her own sake, and cause him, in degree, to be loved for hers—he knew to be out of the question. He could neither expect nor exact more than mere knee and lip courtesy,—but this he did exact to the very letter; and any failure in such respects as regarded his wife, he took care to make it well known that he should resent in the highest degree.

So the third Mrs. Langford with whom I have made you acquainted was installed at Ravenscliffe; and a contrast indeed she proved to her predecessors.

Why Randal Langford made choice of this young woman,—what he saw in

her, and what he expected from her, it were hard to say. True, she was a handsome, black-eyed, black-haired, black-browed girl, as I have told you; but Randal Langford, as every one knew, was no man to be made the dupe of vulgar good looks. She was, moreover, shrewd, clever, and plausible; but he was no man to be taken in by plausibility, or imposed upon by this sort of common-place cleverness. He was one of far too great abilities himself to value the possession of them in a second-rate degree by others. And as for delicacy, nobility of heart, generosity of temper, or any of those finer moral qualities which lift their possessor, be he or she who they may, above the common condition, and redeem every exterior disadvantage, there was nothing of that kind to be predicated in favour of Rachel Woodly, now elevated to the high position of Madam Langford, of Ravenscliffe.

Marriages of this description have always appeared to me an unintelligible mystery; and this proved an enigma without an answer to the worthy inhabitants of the

neighbourhood of Ravenscliffe, — vainly they endeavoured to account for the mortifying fact, which remained simply inexplicable, as I relate.

Nothing, however, as will easily be believed, could be more injurious to the right development of Randal Langford's character than the step he had taken. Henry Taylor, in one of his essays, justly observes, that though marriage with an inferior character of man may serve, and in some instances actually does serve, to call forth and develope the best qualities in the woman, yet that the most superior man, under the opposite condition, invariably and inevitably degenerates, seeming, by a strange sort of fatality, to be dragged down to a moral equality, with his inferior partner. This observation applied but too justly here. Every fault in Randal's character seemed increased, in consequence of this ill-starred match.

His haughtiness, and pride were aggravated by jealous suspicion of slights or contempts from all who approached him. He seemed to forestall offence, and to meet it by wrapping himself up in

additional reserve and sternness. The insolence with which, in his youth, he had been too justly reproached, reappeared, and in a still more unamiable form. He exacted the most reverential deference from every inferior whom he suffered to approach him, and kept his equals, and even his superiors, somewhat in awe by the haughty distance of his manners. In short, he appeared the victim of a perpetual and degrading jealousy, lest the step he had taken should lessen his claims to universal deference, and to resent even the slightest derogation from it, in a manner the most unreasonable.

Mrs. Langford, you may rest assured, was not one to be behind her husband in this insolent determination to bear down public opinion by main force. She played her part, indeed, with singular audacity—the audacity of a particularly coarse and vulgar mind; holding her place as pertinaciously as though she had been one of the best born and best educated among the young ladies of the county. Apparently incapable of discern-

ing her own defects, or at least perfectly indifferent as to the effect they might produce upon others: she was Mrs. Langford, of Ravenscliffe, and what mattered the rest?

Hard, clever, with nerves of iron, and a face of brass, she bore down all opposition,—and finally succeeded, as many before her have done, and many after her will do, in establishing herself, not only as a tolerated nuisance, but as a sort of accepted exception in the circles she frequented. She persevered in being insolent, rude, free-spoken, and disagreeable, until every instance of politeness and good-nature from her was hailed and received as a favour and a boon; and soon obtained more good-will for her occasional display of good qualities, than ever followed the persevering and habitual exercise of them.

Mrs. Langford, the year of her marriage, had presented Randal with a son; and four years after his birth, with a little saucy, black-eyed baby of a daughter. The three children—the fair boy who was the very picture of the lost Eleanor—and the two

by the second wife, who in darkness of complexion resembled their parents—were at this time together living at Ravenscliffe, the boys were entering into manhood—the girl, Emma, being about fifteen.

Mr. Langford is sitting in his library, where he transacts business, at the moment when we find him again.

The library is a large and rather handsome room; though, like the other apartments at Ravenscliffe, possessing no peculiar attraction to the eye, it being too exactly regular in its form and proportions to excite the fancy in any particular way. It is surrounded with book-cases of plain and rather dark oak, fitted with books mostly of an ancient appearance, and whose dark bindings offer little to relieve or enliven the general gloominess and dulness of the apartment.

Two large tables stand in the middle of the room. The one is an old-fashioned ponderous writing-table, fitted up with drawers upon each side, with an open part in the middle to receive the feet of those

engaged in writing at it; it is surmounted on one side by a very large writing desk, covered with green baize. The other table is a more modern affair. It is placed nearer to the window, and there is a chair before it—but no desk. Both tables are covered over with papers.

Fancy some other tables upon which books, letters, and papers lie heaped,—a few old-fashioned chairs, with black hair-cloth seats, one large elbow chair placed before the writing-desk, which is Mr. Langford's proper seat, a green baize over the floor, an ancient grate, a few black urns upon the chimney-piece, a few black busts of Homer, Plato, and such customary worthies surmounting the book-case,—and you have an idea of the apartment in which Randal Langford sits. And here he has sat, almost without exception, for several hours of each day since he came into possession of Ravenscliffe.

He is little changed in the outer man, by the years that have passed over his head. His hair is still raven black, without one silver thread to be detected in it; his sallow cheek is perhaps a shade darker

than it once was, but without either line or wrinkle marked upon it beyond those which the strong passions of youth had impressed years ago. His eye still possesses all its dark lustre, whether it flash in rage—as it yet too often may be seen to do—or preserves its usual expression of deep, yet somewhat saddened, severity. His sinewy form is still as erect, as sinewy, as free from the least superfluous portion of matter to mar its strength or activity as ever. Altogether, years and anxiety have added to, rather than diminished from the imposing grandeur which was the distinguishing characteristic of this remarkable man; and Randal Langford, as he sits there in his elbow chair, in stern but unaffected dignity, leaning his elbow upon the desk and his cheek upon his iron hand, might have well served as a representative of those grim barons of the north, descendants of the fierce Danes who invaded and finally settled themselves in ancient England, setting at defiance all rule or authority but their own.

As he sits there at this moment, the

stern authority and determination written on his countenance is still more observable than usual. He is listening, with an expression of grave displeasure, to a gray-headed, aged, but still robust man, whose broad chest is heaving with emotion, and his gray eyes twinkling to keep down the rising tears—one or two of which have, however, made their escape, and have ran, unheeded, down his cheeks.

A little behind the old man, with an air as if lending him support—backing him, as one might say—stands a fine and beautiful youth, in the full bloom of opening manhood; and oh! what a fair and lovely promise that opening flower of blooming manhood presents!

The young man is little above the middle size, slightly, yet finely and symmetrically made: his hair, of a golden brown, curls, or rather waves, about a head of almost classical beauty; his complexion is fair and naturally delicate, but glowing with health and vigour; his face is slightly and most becomingly embrowned by air and exercise. The eyes of this charming looking person are especially remarkable;

they are of that undefined gray, which is blue and gray, and dark or light by turns, and seems to flash and to cloud, to languish and to burn with every shade of feeling—soft and melting, or bold and defying—instinct with fire and intelligence. His features are remarkably fine, and put together in most harmonious proportions. In short, the face and form are indicative of perfect manly beauty, rendered the more captivating by the graceful truth and energy of every gesture.

The young man is now standing a little behind the person, who, as I said, is pleading so earnestly to Mr. Langford; on whom he bends eager, anxious eyes, as if vainly endeavouring to discover some symptom of relenting feeling in that stern countenance. The youth is Randal's first-born son, Edwin; the child, and in countenance once almost the fac-simile, of Eleanor Wharncliffe. The resemblance, however, has been by this time somewhat impaired, for the manly energy and the frank determination of his expression are not in character with his mother's tender and timid beauty.

But there were moments, when Edwin was moved by soft or melancholy feelings—melted by kindness or sympathy—when his father would start and suddenly change countenance, as if the long-lost mother were again before him. The young man was generous and warm-hearted, ever ready to take part with the weak or the suffering, and to interfere between an offender and his father's displeasure. At this moment he was deeply interested in the fate of a fellow-creature, whose cause he most ardently supported.

Mr. Langford's elbow rests upon his desk, his cheek upon his left hand. I did not tell you, that upon the little finger of that hand there is one single ornament alone—a narrow circle of gold—in short, a wedding-ring. He had never been known to wear any other.

The son anxiously looks into his father's face, longing to discover some softening sign. In vain. The countenance preserves its stern implacable expression.

"He has six children, sir; and his wife—my own poor Maggy—about to be put to bed of another, and she in a consump-

tion, sir: and the doctors all say will go, as soon as she is put to bed. And seven babes of them, to be left deserted—the eldest not ten years old! Oh, Mr. Langford, Mr. Langford!"

"I have already told you—I repeat my words—the man is a poacher, and, I believe, a sheep-stealer.—The latter charge, however, there seems some doubt about, and I shall not pursue it—the fellow will, in default of evidence, luckily for him, escape the gallows. But the other I shall and will press, and transported for poaching he shall be.—He is a disgrace to the country."

The old man retreated a few paces, turned aside his head, and wept.

Edwin advanced a step or two nearer to his father, and bending down a little in his earnestness, as if almost ready to kneel at his feet—and would have done so, could his father have tolerated what he would have thought such a romantic exaggeration of feeling—said,

"Father, have pity upon these poor creatures! Consider, sir, I beg of you, the lamentable condition of the poor man's

family. Look it over, for once—slur the thing over, this once—let him go; do not send him before a magistrate!"

"Edwin, I have often told you—and I tell you again—I forbid your interference in such matters; I will have no one coming between me and my dependents. If I have said it once, I have said it a hundred times, sir—I will not have it done! I expect obedience, Edwin."

"Forgive me, father! I cannot, I cannot be silent, indeed! Poor Humphreys!—He is such a respectable, honest fellow. Is it his fault that Jackson is so irregular in his conduct? Don't break the poor old man's heart about it, I beseech you!"

"Silence, Edwin! or I shall order you to leave the room. And you, Humphreys," turning towards him, "listen to me. You know—and everybody knows, or ought to know—that I have but one rule in such cases; and that is, inflexible and impartial justice. Were I as weak, as this young man would have me to be—were I as easily to be moved to swerve from the direct course of law by an idle compassion, as he would wish—to remit

punishment when punishment is justly due, and accept palliation where no palliation can be made—then there might be some excuse for these offences against the law, which I am resolved to put a stop to. Then—a fellow like Jackson might plead in his excuse, that what had once been remitted might be remitted again, and prate about temptation being present and punishment uncertain. But the fool who flies in the face of a penalty he is *sure* to find exacted, deserves no compassion from me—and shall find none."

"But—but—"

"Edwin! Stand back, and hold your tongue!"

"I know, sir, I know, sir;" sobbed poor Humphreys. "What you say, Mr. Langford, sounds all right—I doubt not is all as it should be; but what is to become of seven fatherless and motherless babes?—nay, it will be only six, for Maggy's in a fair way to break her heart, and there will be an end of her at once, and the poor innocent she is carrying within her—unless you can and will have pity, Mr. Langford."

"Pity! Do not weary me with an ever-

lasting recurrence to that theme. What has justice to do with pity?—Inflexibility, I repeat it, is the only true justice. If I overlook crime in one instance, why not in ten thousand?—Edwin! Why do you put on that dogged look of dissent from what I have said? Do not be insolent, sir! Why do you look as if you disputed the justice of my principles of action, sir."

"Because I do," said the youth with courage.

The dark haughty eyes of the father flashed.

"This! And before a dependent, sir!"

"You should not have asked me, then, whether I agreed with you or not.—No father; I do *not* agree with you—neither in feeling nor in principle. I do *not* think that justice ought to be inflexible. I *do* think that justice ought to be tempered with mercy, or good God of heaven! what would become of us all?"

"Sir! your ripened understanding and remarkable accuracy of perception render you able to instruct—even your own father—in the principles of ethics. I thank you, young man, for being so obliging as to be-

stow upon me a lesson, which, no doubt, my crude and ill-digested view of things requires."

Edwin looked abashed for a moment at this rebuke, and shrunk back. Then he cast his eyes once more upon the poor, disconsolate Humphreys, who stood like one aghast at the scene, seeming to forget his own griefs in terror for the consequences to his advocate,—and touched by the good feeling thus displayed by the poor man even in the paroxysm of his distress, he gathered up his courage, and resolved not to abandon the cause.

"Excuse me, father. Sir, I do not pretend, I do not presume to argue the matter with *you*. I only venture to plead—humbly to plead — It was such a small thing—a brace of hares. Oh, father! My God! All this misery for a brace of hares!"

"Edwin, have done! I command you to have done! You speak like a senseless child. A brace of hares!—Who talks of a brace of hares? It is dishonesty—it is crime. Have you yet to learn, that it is not by the value of what is purloined that

justice estimates the guilt of the purloiner?"

"Yet, sir—oh, Mr. Langford! consider!" urged poor Humphreys, endeavouring to strengthen an argument which had approved itself so well to his comprehension. "Please to consider, sir, for the love of God! Sir! It *was* only a brace of hares; only a brace of hares, sir."

"If it had been a brace of field-mice, so the law had been offended, I have said and I repeat, it would amount to the same thing. Edwin, have done," seeing his son again leaning forward in an attempt to speak; "I will listen to such contemptible casuistry no longer. Have done, sir, when I command you, or please to leave the room."

The young man again retreated. There was a something between condemnation of the sentiment expressed and defiance of the command accompanying it to be discerned in his countenance. His father, who seemed to read every expression of that face, and to be moved by it in a strange manner, decyphered this meaning, and was the more and more exasperated.

"Do you mean to defy me, Edwin, with that look?"

"I said nothing, sir."

"Do you mean to dispute my authority, as well as my opinions?"

"I did not say that I did, sir."

"No, you did not say it,—true!" exclaimed Mr. Langford, giving way to a sudden burst of rage—"but you look it—Every feature of your face speaks contradiction and defiance."

"We cannot command our features, sir—We cannot teach our looks to be silent—They are treacherous things, and betray us whether we will or no."

"Then I am to understand you to acknowledge, that what your face expressed, your heart dictated, and that with head and heart you disputed my opinions and defied my authority?"

The young man made no answer.

"Speak, Edwin."

"You commanded me to be silent."

"I command you now to speak."

"What to say?"

"Whether I read your countenance rightly or not?"

"What if you did?"

Mr. Langford made a sudden start forward, half rose from his chair; his gesture was almost that of one about to strike a blow. Edwin shrank back. Humphreys flung himself forward, as if to interpose between father and son. It was the impulse of a moment; before a second could have been counted Mr. Langford had recovered himself, and was reseated; but Edwin had retreated at the sudden and passionate gesture of his father, had turned away, and left the room.

The father looked after him wistfully, but he would not call him back. He felt at this moment, with more than usual violence, all the distraction of contending emotions, which were, alas! too often associated with his son, his darling son! whom he loved as his own soul, as the very apple of his eye. He admired the boy for his talents, exulted in his extraordinary beauty, adored him for the spirit, generosity, and goodness of his character; and yet he for ever contradicted him—seemed perpetually irritated

against him, taking unreasonable offence at the slightest fault, and jealous beyond measure at the least thing which could be construed into a failing in respect or affection.

Oh, it was bitter for the stern, proud, unbending man, that this youth, this almost child,—adored as he in secret was,—seemed, by a strange fatality in their characters to stand perpetually in opposition to his father's opinions, and to be an obstruction in his unrelenting course. He might be compared to the child in the mythic fable, placed there to turn aside the course of his father's ploughshare.

Alas! had it been Randal Langford whose constancy had thus been put to the proof,—the plough would, I fear, have pursued its course undeviating,—and the flower been severed there where it stood.

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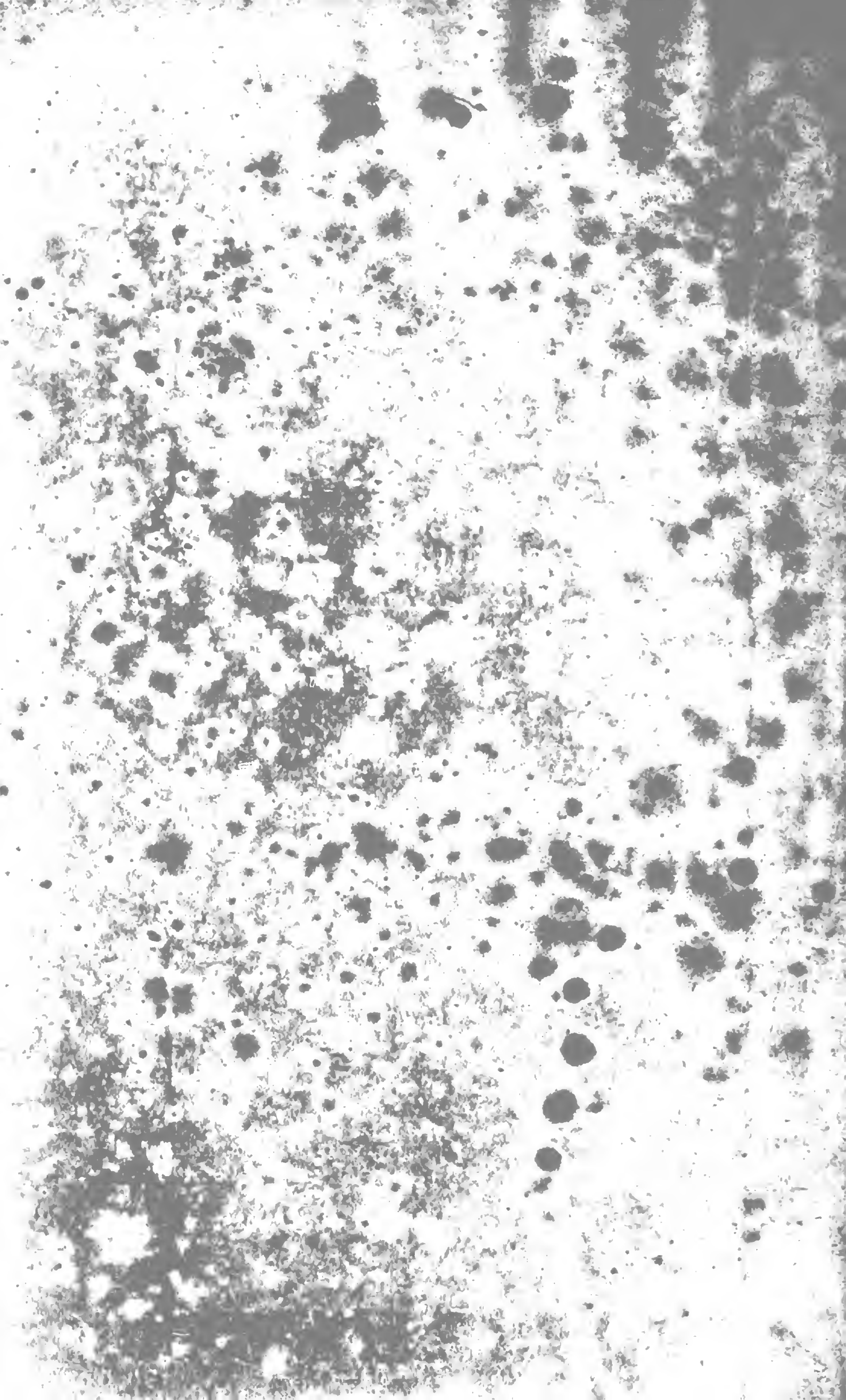

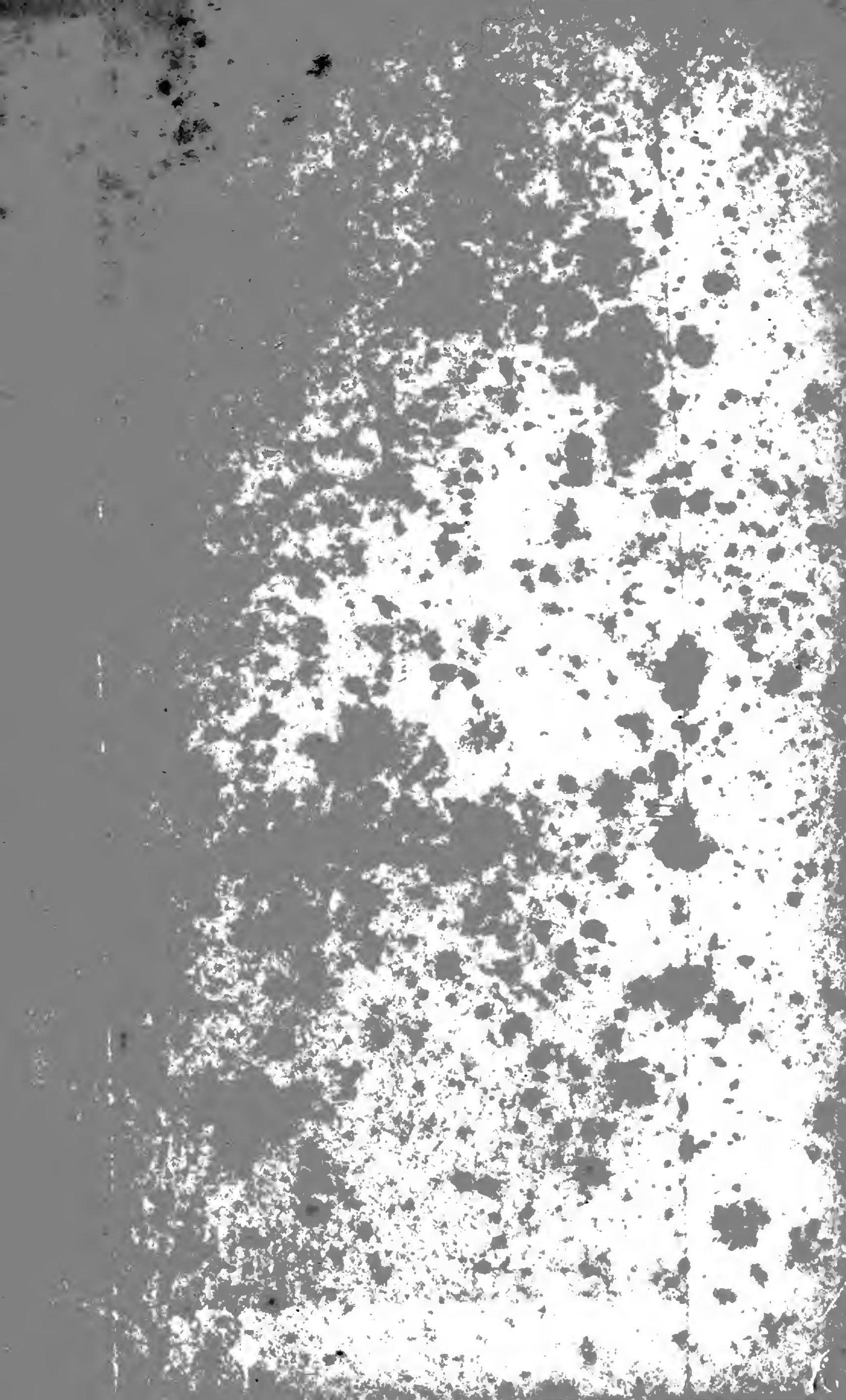

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